

RUNNEMEDE.



AN ANCIENT LEGEND.

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R U N N E M E D E .

An Ancient Legend.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY LOUISA SIDNEY STANHOPE,

AUTHOR OF

THE BANDIT'S BRIDE; THE CRUSADERS; THE SIEGE OF KENILWORTH;
FESTIVAL OF MORA; AGE WE LIVE IN, &c. &c.

Where are the chiefs of the times of old? They have set like stars that have shone.
We only hear the sound of their praise. They were renowned in their years:
the terror of other times. OSSIAN.

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RUNNEMEDE.

CHAPTER I.

"Ay, to the life, in liberty's good cause
We'll fight; and to the utmost verge of earth,
We will adventure."

THE first of November, as though the heavens smiled on the embryo seeds, bursting, and spreading, and shooting to fruition, was as the brightest day in the past bright month of October; for from the earliest streak of radiance, the mists, fast scudding before the growing glory, gave promise of a cloudless sky. Many a heart joyed in the token—many a spirit, fast trammelled in the bonds of

superstition, hailed it as the presage of hereafter triumph—many an eye glanced o'er the huge and towering walls of St. Edmund's monastery, frowning and darkening in the distance, yet bearing on its stained and storied panes, the burnish of that heaven it was reared to worship !

Even now the ruins of its ancient greatness possess both beauty and splendour : but in that early period, when darkness spread o'er the face of things, and glory to God was the boast and the aim of man ; when frankincense smoked at the high altar, and gifts of the spirit tokened the zeal and the humiliation of the flesh, no religious institution, to borrow the language of Leland, who lived an eye witness of its wealth and its grandeur, was *more noble, whether one considers the endowments, largeness, or unparalleled magnificence. One might think even the monastery alone, a city ; so many gates it has (some whereof are brass) so many towers, and*
a church,

a church, than which nothing can be more magnificent !

Sojourning in the town of St. Edmund's-bury, and tarrying the appointed hour to move in slow procession to the abbey-church, the nominated pilgrimage cloaked the assembled nobles in the sad vestments of penitence ; yet did the " amice grey" cover many a heart, swelling, and throbbing, and teeming with the passions of the world ; did the rankling goads of hate, and ambition, and party-feeling, lurk, like hidden fires, craving but the vent-pass to issue into flame. As now, the minds of men, were active, turbulent, and fitful ; seeking change, and toiling for preeminence ; chasing the painted shadows of sense, and neglecting the brighter substances of reality : as now, the world, teeming with innovation, was torn and tossed by strange and wild convulsions ; and man, alternately the prey and the slave of his own crude and sickly humours, brood-

ing over imaginary ills, or widening the breach of division, by magnifying into mortal injury, the slightest provocation; labouring out materials for self-torture, or spreading into giant mould, the incidental calamities of life!—Alike in each page in the strange volume of human destiny, amid the high and the lowly, the prosperous and the adverse, we trace in *self* the sure source of the reigning mischief, the existing root of the universal malady; we trace the shoals and quicksands, wrecking our fortunes and blighting our hopes, to the suggestions of our own passions:—but however the internal spring—like many a spring in lighter matter—lose its gold in the crucible of the alchymist; the promise was boundless; the effect, guided by the high will of unerring destiny, great, abundant, replete with rich and deathless fruit! like the grain of mustard-seed, cast into the earth, and becoming “a tree, so that the birds of the air lodge
in

in the branches," its ramifications, salutary to the dearest hopes of man, spreading—strengthening — growing — extending through a long course of ages, rise in the one grant of MAGNA CHARTER, the palladium of our liberty and our constitution !

The grand and imposing rites of Catholic worship, fanning alike the heart and the faney, and inspiring a zeal almost as ardent as burnt in the spirit of croisade, wedded each member of the confederacy to the one common cause. It was sustained and headed by the primate of England, and strengthened by his suffragan bishops : and at the close of the festival of All Saints, when the psalmody had ceased, and the full choir was hushed and still, and save the abbot, the monks of St. Edmund's had retired from the church, the earls and barons, approaching the high altar, tarried in mute expectancy the counsel of the archbishop. Numerous and imposing was

the assemblage : it consisted of the flower and the strength of the kingdom ; and of such an assemblage, their “ deeds were as streams of light, before the eyes of bards”—for they toiled for good to come—they laboured for the immunity of millions ! The archbishop spoke, and

“—— The buzz of guat or fly,
Winging in airy circle, had sounded
In the stillness.”

“ We meet, my lords,” he exclaimed, “ here, in solemn assembly, in one, to glorify God, and to redress the grievances of his creatures. Free from hate and grovelling passion, uninfluenced by revenge or personal enmity, purged from the dross of malice and uncharitableness, we meet, to mourn existing ill, and labour for forthcoming good. Posterity rests in our keeping, the weal, the happiness, the freedom of ages, yet unborn. It is for us to file away the chains hung around our necks, and forged by unjust and vindictive despotism ; it is
for

for us to swear, here, on the high altar of our worship—here, in the sight and in the name of the great God of our salvation—here, on this festival of All Saints, to stickle, to the peril of life, for the renewal and observance of our rights and indemnities.”

“ We swear ! we all swear ! ” reverberated through the arched roof ; and the last echo had scarcely ceased, when one solitary, deep, emphatic voice, pronounced—“ Ay, unto death ! ”

That voice rivetted every eye upon the speaker. It was a proscribed man, who reckless of denouncement and ruin, stood fearless in the midst of the assembled nobles. In the green and ripe summer of his strength, he had fled away from the fire-blast of persecution and hate ; now, even in the dominion of his mortal foe, he stood forth the bold avenger of a nation’s grievances ! In the green and ripe summer of his strength, he had abandoned home and country :

now, he looked like one, upon whom persecution and hardship had told heavy ; for his brow was dappled with winter's hoar-frost, and his visage bronzed with hot suns and rough blasts. He seemed as a man upon whom misfortune had expended her last arrow ; yet, as the tough oak, stemming the buffet of the angry winds, he stood stanch and firm amid the storm. Spite of the sacredness of the spot and of the calling, many a hand was extended in fellowship ; and the heart which persecution could not shake, and the eye which misery could not wring of one single tear, was softened and melted to woman's weakness : it felt to

“ Open all the cells where mem'ry slept :”

every nerve shook ; every subduing feeling rose to agony—he bent his face upon his breast, and wept. But brief, wellnigh to a flitting shade, was the indulgence ; manfully wrestling down the weakness.

weakness, he glanced around, and his bow, and his smile of graciousness, noted the noble and the warrior.

Again every sound was hushed to silence ; again every eye was turned upon the main spring of the new confederacy. It was expectation, it was fate itself which seemed to hang upon the breath of the father in God : his example, and his stimulating influence, was as an absolving clause from the crime of disobedience and disloyalty—was, as the palliating inedium, wherewith violence and nonconformity were prostituted into patriotism.

“ My visions are replete with gloom and woe,” resumed the primate—“ I see the whole kingdom shrouded in one black mantle—I see slavery, and death, and despair, and ruin, on every side. We are called upon, my sons : likened unto the inspiration of Peter the hermit, pointing to the redemption of the holy places, so are we roused and rallied from

our deep sleep. Ours be the independence of England—ours be the redemption of a whole race : posterity claims it at our hands ; generations, yet unborn, will, through us, be blessed or cursed. Alas ! alas !” he feelingly pursued, “ one universal groan echoes throughout the land : we are enslaved by him who ought to be our parent ; we are shackled, we are iron-bound, by him, who ought to pour upon our heads, the teeming measure of blessings and of service. Yet sacred be the majesty of the Lord’s anointed ! sacred be the trust imposed upon men ! Indignation must not hurry into revenge, neither must zeal betray into rashness. No, no, my sons ; though the royal John has slid away from his oaths and his promises—though he has given passion the rein, and prejudice the mastery—though he has trampled upon justice, and outraged law—though he has dealt curses instead of blessings—though his backslidings be countless as
the

the sands on the seashore; still must we hem him in from violence and outrage; still must we preserve him at the peril of life."

"Be thou the sun to lighten our track," said the baron Fitz Walter, speaking in the voice of the assembled nobles.

"With God's good grace," meekly pronounced the primate: "all else is impotent and vain. Our trust must be unanimity, our impulse patriotism: we must move with one soul, my lords; we must bosom one influence. The common misery must be as fuel to the fire of our zeal, else must our hopes be wrecked, and our labours inefficient."

"The common misery be as a quickening goad to courage and to action," exclaimed the disguised patriot. "Alas! holy father, the common misery, the individual misery"—and he struck his hand upon his bankrupt heart—"furnishes a brand, fierce as the brand of Ate."

"Not so, my son," and the archbishop

piously crossed himself as he spoke. "We must pray against the incitements of lawless passion; we must, one and all, sacrifice individual injury to general service: sinking the actions of the man in the actions of the monarch, we must sue for public defalcation, not for private crime. Ay, and we must buckle on the tight rein of self-restraint ourselves; we must shape our own feelings to our own fortune, nor yield to the selfsame latitude for which we seek recognition."

"Father," said the stranger, emphatically. "we must first drink of the stagnant lake of oblivion, ere we forget our injuries."

"Say, rather, of the life-giving cup of salvation," piously rejoined the holy Langton, "to fashion us to the injunction of forgiveness."

"True; but man is at best fitful and disobedient, holy sir. I have conned the lesson, in exile, privation, and woe—I
have

have strove to subvert all the jarring principles within me: but the blood will boil, and the spirit will rebel, when others, near and dear, are dragged into the ruin. Crime may incur confiscation and attain; but where caprice and heartless tyranny bandies the storm, where lives the human power of acquiescence?"

"Not of ourselves—I grant you, not of ourselves," said the archbishop, "for we are but sinful dust and ashes: yet has a preceptor gone before us—yet does an ensample, more lasting than the base of earth, exist, to methodise and to chasten. 'As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.' Alack! and he was persecuted unto death, and 'with his stripes are we healed.'"

Deep and solemn was the pause which ensued: for a brief season, all of temporal was lost in spiritual feeling: the archbishop bent his knee at the high altar;

altar ; and he prayed aloud, prayed for humbleness of mind, for grace, for patience, for humility : and all assembled in the mighty calling prayed with him ; for each and every soul felt the galling fetter of its own peculiar sin, and each and every soul rose lighter and better. It was as the stress for mastery, as the subjugation of self ; and the fervently-breathed aspirations for submission and conduct, assuaged and softened all of rankling asperity.

“ Here, in this blessed sanctuary of worship, in the sight of God and his angels, we lay down our burdens,” said the archbishop, rising, and turning to the nobles, “ and we take up the pure zeal of public service, without attaint, without prejudice ; freed from the mortal callings of sense, and the grovelling lusts of the world, we dedicate our mortal bodies to the one glorious calling of reform and patriotism.”

“ We pledge ourselves unto death !

We

We all pledge ourselves unto death!" pronounced the barons, in one common voice.

The archbishop raised his eyes in pious thanksgiving, then thrusting his hand into his bosom, he drew forth a copy of Henry the First's charter, and of the laws of St. Edward: he placed them on the altar, and he humbled himself before them, as before the relics of martyrdom. Every knee bowed—every eye was cast upon the earth: the silence, the reverence, was awe-ffaught; not the full peal of the organ, not the loud burst of the praise-giving anthem, could have deepened the solemnity. Again the archbishop spoke, and again, even respiration was held, in the earnestness of attention. —“ The precious register of our liberties, the confirmation of our rights,” he exclaimed, placing his hand on the sacred record, “ preserved in the bosom of holy church, and vouchsafed us as an incitement to noble daring. Friends! brethren!

—thren!

thren! Englishmen! now is the season for exertion; now is the accepted time for enterprise. Be unanimity our bounden rule; be vigour, be intrepidity, our nerve of action; and the blessing of God, and the blessing of the church, and the blessing of our own hearts, rest upon the struggle!"

"Amen!" ejaculated each voice; and the patriot, growing in zeal, and glowing in enthusiasm, firmly pursued:—"First, my friends, would I warn of the weight of the calling, that each spirit, divorced from fleshly lust, and cleansed from the morbid dross of self-interest, embark, pure and free in the common service: no grovelling stimulus of hate or injury, no private revenge, or personal enmity, must buckle pique on public service. The true patriot lives superior to every sinister bias: the pangs of a whole nation call upon him to heal; the wounds of a whole nation call upon him to bind; his actions, as his motives,
must

must dare the trump of Fame ; for posterity will weigh his deeds, and enrol him, accursed or blessed."

" Accursed or blessed, be each and every member of this great confederacy !" exclaimed the stranger — " accursed or blessed, as our actions and our motives stem the brunt !"

" Be it so," said the archbishop, " for the defalcation of the monarch indemnifies not the subject ; and rebellion is as the spawn of hell, engendering murder, and hate, and violence, and outrage ; trampling on all law, and gorging on all order."

" Then wherefore come we hither ?" asked the baron Fitz Walter—" if subjection be our duty, and sufferance our province, wherefore come we thus in secrecy and in stealth ?"

" We come, to enfranchise by firmness ; to weigh our wrongs, and crave redress, not by sword-point, but by calm and dutiful appeal. This be the code of our obedience"—

obedience"—and the archbishop grasped tight the charter of our first Henry—"this be the limitation of our demands. We crave at the hands of my liege the king, the fulfilment of his coronation oath; we crave this grant of our liberty; and nought of fealty, nought of submission, shall be wanting to his service."

"Peradventure," observed the earl of Clare, "my liege the king may still withhold our lack of grace. What though he scoff at our protestations, and refuse the grant?"

"Then," replied the prelate, "be a just cause the staff of our dependence; be slavery to ourselves, or freedom to our posterity, the crying alternatives to action. My lords—my fellow men," and his voice sank to persuasive appeal, "ours is a task, subtle as fire; a track, glib as ice; yet must we pass unseared through the flame—must we toil without miss of our footing. Bound in one confederacy, and sworn to one aim, warily
must

must we move; and departing hence, and dispersing in quiet, as seemeth fitting to our godly calling, let us forthwith return to our respective homes, and rallying around us, our arms and our strength, not in hostility, but in defence, muster, and grow and gather in nerve and substance; that when in compliance with ancient usage, at this coming festival of Christmas, we assemble around the sacred person of the anointed John, we may stand forth as Englishmen, and as Englishmen, bosom the one common spirit of liberty."

"What, bear our ills to the foot of the throne—unfold the ell-long catalogue of our grievances?" demanded the earl of Surrey; "tell the king, to his teeth, of the perversion of law, and the abuse of power?"

"Even so," rejoined the archbishop: "wage war on his injustice and his passions, then give him ground to cool in the strength of our adherents. We must

must aet, as though we had all to fear ; we must speak, as though we had all to hope. The king may grant to conjoint power, what to individual appeal he may withhold. Yet must we not lose sight of the lowliness of the subject, nor forego our own sworn share in the great charter: we must be humble; we must be patient; we——nay, sneer not, good my lords”——for the like smile of irony and defiance curled the lips of each bold noble——“ we must con the lesson of self-control, nor lose sight of duty in the unbridled rule of our own will. Mark me: as ye would hope for good to come—as ye would crave better days and brighter prospects—at Christmas we must to the court. There, on bended knee, urge our liege lord the king, to confirm by his own special charter, and seal with his own sign-manual, the rights and liberties, vouchsafed us by king Edward of blessed memory. Leagued in one vast conjunction, in one body we must

must move, in one voice we must set forth the universal benefice. We must plead in the name of England; we must act as the spirit of England—for without the spirit Liberty, the health of England would be sapped, the nerve of England would be broken!"

"Without the spirit Liberty," pronounced a hundred tongues, "England becomes one vast charnel-house; for in defence of the spirit Liberty, England's sons will yield up life!"

"Enough! enough!" resumed the pious Langton—"God and holy church side with us! At Christmas we will act—till Christmas we will ponder on our ways, and pray grace upon the mighty struggle."

"Be it so," said the earl of Surrey, and he spoke in the feeling of the whole assembly. "Till Christmas, dispersing in peace, we will smother down the cry of our wrongs, and the fire of our just indignation: at Christmas, true, as I am belted

belted earl, will we muster men and horse, and meeting in the presence of my lord the king, boldly proclaim our demand, and stickle for our chartered freedom."

CHAPTER II.

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"—— The dove kens not the serpent's wiles;
Neither dreams she the hidden snare, which smiles
To trap her freedom."

AT sunset Matilda was close wrapped in her mantle, and faithful to her appointment, ere yet the last streak of radiance had vanished from the heavens, she descended to the terrace. Wildly did her heart flutter as she passed swiftly away from the hospitable abode of the baron de Cantilupe, yet did no misgivings assail her fancy: hers were the bodings of youth and pictured happiness;

ness ; her father, her husband, shone bright in the haze of the future : one little hour, and suspense might be exchanged for rapturous certainty : she might return to the safe haven of friendship, assured, where now she could only hope. Alas ! hers was deluding bliss—hers was the air-built fabric of anticipation, which, light as fairy visions, and bright as the tints of Iris, hoodwink the judgment, and cozen the heart—hers was that subtle innagery, buoying into the seventh heaven, whilst every vestige of its basement is of earth !

She paused at the top of the flight of steps descending to the water : distinctly did she hear the splash of oars and the low whispering of voices : the next instant, and the stranger guide appeared around a projecting butment ; and true as pilot steering midst the waves of ocean, he led to the slight skiff tarrying her approach. It was an evening glowing in all the tints of poesy ; the air soft ;

soft ; the west dappled with a thousand glories ; the trees gorgeous in the rich liveries of autumn ; the river, unruffled, and bearing on its blue bosom, the still bluer colour of the sky ! Matilda stepped into the boat ; and as it pushed from shore, as it cut through the liquid mirror, no fear assailed her fancy, no misgiving chilled her heart : she saw the boatmen diligently ply their oars ; she saw the abode of the baron de Cantilupe fast receding ; she saw a smile, roguish and sportful, curl the lip of the stranger-youth, yet she questioned not of the point of destination : hope whispered it the asylum of him she loved, and each instant expectation gathered.

From the then lonely Thames, the boat passed into the river Fleet, and shooting into utter shadow, formed by the o'erhanging walls of a huge building, anchored in a kind of creek. The youth leaped on shore ; he sprung up a flight of steps, and reaching a low arched gateway,

gateway, vigorously pulled a bell : the next instant and the gate opened, and a man appeared, and a parley succeeded. Matilda bent forward—she listened—she gazed eagerly, wistfully ; her cheeks glowed, and her heart glowed also. Was this the abiding-place of her father ?—was it the asylum he had chosen from the ken of his enemies ? Yet what could it all mean ? debate arose to anger—anger to invective : the servant barred the entrance of the youth ; and the youth, with all the assumption of low arrogance, strove to enforce a passage. She cast a timid glance on the boatmen, silently resting on their oars, and the dark eyes of one, cowering from beneath his slouched hat, seemed to be rivetted upon her. Apprehension, doubt, suspicion, gathered ; her pulses quickened ; her very heart throbbed audibly ; yet she felt something like assurance, in that dark eye, and that bronzed cheek. She tried to speak, but he motioned

silence, and quick again was her attention chained by the louder broil of the angry disputants. "Go to, knave," muttered the surly porter; "I am not to be bamboozled by an unfledged chin: go, and bear thy lies to other hearers."

"Lies, forsooth!" said the vexed and angry boy. "I tell thee, unmannered knave, 'tis gospel-truth. How should I know aught of the one sojourning with the white monks of Cisteaux, had not my lord said it?"

The almost audible start of the boatman whose eye and whose manner had before fixed the notice of Matilda now again awakened all her interest: she saw him stroke back the coal-black locks half shadowing his sun-burnt brow; she saw the lightning-flash of high emotion, glow and fade;—she saw him half raise himself, 'as though to rend away all mystery, and then, in wily watchfulness, sink back, as softly he whispered — "The daughter of the gardener Walter!"

"And

“ And who are you ? ” questioned the agitated girl.

The boatman placed his finger on his lip, and again all his attention seemed directed on the enraged and half weeping boy.

“ Wilt thou admit us ? Wilt thou grant us tarrying-room, only until my lord come ? And then—and then—— ”

“ And what then ? ” sneeringly repeated the porter.

“ Why then,” and the youth, stung and irritated, yielded to all his former petulance, “ peradventure my lord may reward thee according to my liking.”

“ And now,” churlishly grumbled the porter, “ thou mayest tarry according to my liking.” And he would have retreated, and reclosed the gate, but the boy, snatching at his doublet, forcibly withheld him. “ Would I were my lord for our single hour ! ” he exclaimed. “ By the rood, and thy battered carcass should waver from the castle battle-

ments ! Why thou dolt ! thou footlicker ! thou abortion of spirit ! thou mere effigy of man ! seest thou not that I come on my lord's errand ? That—that—" and he sank his voice so that his words were lost.

" I care not for thy errand—I care not for thyself. Body-o'me, thou mayest tarry, or thou mayest speed to Beelzebub before thy time ! Why, varlet, thou art as glib of tongue, as any bel-dam in the rule of my lord John the king."

" And thou," quick retorted the boy, " art as scant of sense, as any of thy brother knaves of the shoulder-knot ! Go, and seek thy lord, and tell him of thy courtesy ; and he will drub thee, forsooth, into better manners, and teach thee how next to gleeek upon his lady-love."

" A hair mesh to trap elephants," muttered the surly porter ; then dexterously freeing himself from the gripe of
the

the boy—" I tell thee, once for all," he thundered, " my lord Savary de Mauleon is now at the court at Westminster. Go, thee, brawl to the flood, for thy language is unseemly." And quick retreating, he slammed the gate in the very face of the confounded emissary.

At the name of the lord Savary de Mauleon, Matilda uttered a fearful cry: conviction burst upon her senses; she felt herself duped into the power of the man she hated, and where was the arm to rescue? Reckless of danger, reckless of life itself, she sprung up—she would have precipitated herself from the boat, had not the giant grasp of the mysterious boatman stayed her.

" Fear not," he said—" Thy honour is my honour. Matilda, I will die, or I will save thee."

Again Matilda raised her eyes to the face of the speaker, but no single lineament awakened recognition: anger, and indignation, and outraged spirit, like

lightning flashed o'er his brow : laden, not crushed, by the heavy hand of misfortune, he looked as one, whose pride and whose inborn greatness, wrestling with the malice, triumphs o'er the rübs of the world ; yet was there softness and tenderness in his glance, and when again he pronounced, " Fear not," his tone was that of strong and pathetic feeling.

Clamour and wild confusion first aroused to the necessity for exertion ; the loud pummelling of the enraged youth, and the louder pecl of the bell, was quick succeeded by the re-opening of the gate. The cry of Matilda rose wilder and more piercing than before ; impulsively she snatched at the arm of the stranger boatman :—for it was not the porter—it was the astounding demon of her repose—it was the lord Savary de Mauleon, habited in the light and costly habiliments of a court, with crimson pantofles, satin vest, jewelled cap, and waving plume, who stood in the doorway.

way. Rapid as is the light phantasy of a dream, pushing her gently back, the boatman strove to shove the boat from shore; but the wily boy had grappled it with hooks of iron, and ere he could unloose the moorings, the lord Savary de Mauleon had gained the bank. Persuasion and mild conciliation hung upon his tongue; he looked the transport he feared to utter; but when he spoke, when he strove to appease and to assure, when he would have stepped into the boat, the cold shudder of hate iced the life-blood of Matilda: she hid her face, tintless as marble, in the folds of her mantle, and her shriek was as the shriek of madness. That shriek, like the igniting steel, roused into fire the feelings and the passions of the stranger: his figure towered into majesty; his movement into decision; vivid crimson flushed o'er his bronzed cheek; his frown was dreadful as the whirlwind, and death seemed to ride on the lightning of his
c 4 glance.

glance. The uplifted oar barred the entrance of De Mauleon.—“ Hold, recreant,” exclaimed the boatman: “ the daughter of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, in me finds a champion.”-

“ In thee,” thundered the baffled De Mauleon. “ Avaunt, uncourtly hind, lest I crush thee into nothing.”

“ Not thy errand can give thee supremacy, proud noble,” sternly rejoined the stranger; “ for thy actions sink thee far beneath the supposed hind thou threatenest. Advance not on thy peril; for by the blessed Jesu, I will guard the child of Walter, by the annihilation of a thousand such as thee !”

The unsheathed sword of De Mauleon was in his hand: but what was the unsheathed sword of De Mauleon, opposed to the iron-nerved arm of the boatman? his weapon was wielded on the side of the innocent and oppressed; his weapon was the weapon of defence:
and

and such is the force of probity and justice, that it made the proud noble quail, in despite of all his boastings.

"Thou art an unmanuèred varlet," he exclaimed, swallowing down his ire, and striving for the mastery of passion: "but on my life, I like thy spirit, and fain would I woo thee into better courtesy." As he spoke, he drew forth a silken purse, and chinking the glittering lure, threw it into the boat.

The stranger smiled contemptuously—"Thou wouldst gauge the strength of my probity," he said; "but know 'tis far beyond thy bidding; for however misfortune may subdue, not utter penury can sink me to the hireling of a villain." And he took the purse, and with a cold glance of defiance, hurled it into the river.

"Villain!" echoed De Mauleon—"Bold slave, knowest thou whom thou darest?"

"Ay, one who basks in royal sunshine,"

shine," quick replied the boatman; "one, who basely shifting from the honourable standard of his own country, now curries favour, at a source, as base and as degenerate as his own; one——".

"Peace," thundered De Maulcon, "lest I degrade myself even to thy chastiser." But though his eyes glared the scathing fire of wrath, though his wishes aimed at annihilation, still did the extended oar parry each effort to advance; still did the sarcastic smile, curling the lip of the boatman, testify the impotence of his threatenings.

"One," and the stranger, regardless of the interruption, spoke in a tone of cold and biting irony, "who hatching the mischief-plot, yields to the headlong impulse of passion, unmindful of the heart-pangs of others."

"And thou—thou," demanded De Mauleon, "by what right, darest thou stand betwixt me and my pleasure?"

"By the right of nature—by the tie
of

of blood," replied the boatman. "In me, behold the uncle of Matilda, the brother of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux. Nay, nay," waving back the trembling, agitated girl, "'tis no season for enervating feeling. Take courage, dear one; I am here in the stead of thy father: blessed be God, I am here! blessed be God, I possess a heart and an arm to rescue thee from yon hellhound! And now," addressing his companion in the boat, "tear up the mooring, and let us to a fitter tarrying-place."

"Not on thy life! not on thy soul!" and the enraged De Mauleon attempted to spring into the boat: but dizzy with disappointment and with passion, stung at the dream of his hopes thus dissolving in the moment of fruition, or peradventure, encountering the vigorous arm of his opponent, he missed his footing, and fell headlong into the Fleet. The shout of the boatman and the shriek of

Matilda mingled; forgetful of injury, feeling but the struggles and the danger of a fellow-mortal, she would have stretched forth her hand—she would have besought—she did beseech succour: but the boatmen heeded not her prayers: the moment of escape, the lucky chance of shooting away, unmarked and untraced, was not to be sacrificed to the call of humanity. One united and desperate effort, and the grappling-iron gave way: and at the instant, that a crowd of domestics, led on by the youthful emissary of De Mauleon, rushed down the steps, the boat hove from shore;—and ere, gaining the bank, they rescued their drenched and struggling lord from his plunge of peril, the boat and the boatmen alike were lost in distance.

CHAPTER III.

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" Strange, and wild, and varied, and complex to  
Mortal eye, are the vicissitudes of  
Human destiny ! From the cradle to  
The grave, some pass through a bed of flowers—  
Some through a brake of thorns !"

MINGLED and indefinable was the rush of feeling, as Matilda looked up, as she met the eyes of her paternal uncle rivetted upon her : tears glistened in those eyes, and softening sensibility thrilled o'er every feature ; yet not for an instant did he relax in the labour of the oar, not for an instant did he give thought to speech. He seemed to row for life—for more than life :—it was the honour, it was the purity of an imagined orphan niece, which plied each nerve, and strained each sinew ; it was to res-  
cue

eue her from the gripe of tyrant power ; it was to rend her from the subtle toil of sin ;—if living, it was to restore her to her father, “ pure as the iciele which hangs on Dian’s temple ”—if dead, it was to save his unblenched fame from dishonour, that all the great powers of his nature were exerted. And his companion in adventure and in toil bosomed the like energy and the like hardihood ; for he too braved fatigue, and manfully plied the oar ; he too felt the urgent call for exertion ; he too, looked to escape, as the benighted wayfarer looks to the rising of a new day :—and ever and anon did he glance at Matilda, as she sat close wrapped in her mantle, and trembling beneath the chilling breath of evening, with an expression of ardent pitying interest.

The lengthening shadows of twilight fast deepened into night, yet the profound silence was unbroken ; it seemed as though a spell hung upon every object,

ject, for the ripple of the current was scarce heard, and the trees and underwood, thick clothing the banks, looked black, and still, and dead,

“As the fat weed which rots on Lethe’s shore.”

As the boat glided onwards, the aspect grew wilder and more dreary; and the gratitude and the glad surprise which had swelled high in the heart of Matilda, yielded to apprehension and dismay. She strove to recognise objects, but all was strange around; she looked wistfully in the face of her acknowledged uncle, but in the imperfect haze, she read nought to allay her fears or disprove her doubts. Was he indeed her uncle? or was it some new toil, deep and deadly as the former? Her breath quickened—her terror amounted to agony; wildly she started, and wildly she questioned of her destination.

“Poor child!” said the boatman, “the deceits and evil practices of men, have  
already

already tainted thy pure mind with suspicion. Fear not ; I am no despoiler, no subtle ravisher. I am thy uncle Hugh, the brother of thy father Walter :—for further appellation, tarry a fitter season.”

“ My father ! my dear father ! ” sighed Matilda, and she sunk back, and yielded to tears.

“ If thy father lives, he will bless me,” solemnly rejoined Hugh ; “ if no longer a sojourner of earth, the consciousness of a performed duty be my guerdon.”

“ Then thou knowest nought of my father,” sobbed Matilda ; “ thou canst shed no light on the strange disappearance of my father.”

“ I lost all trace of thy father at the bridge of Nantes,” returned Hugh, “ when the rash ardour of prince Louis, betrayed himself and his brave followers into the hands of the wily English. Impelled by my persuasion from the safe retreat he had chosen, thy father renounced the calm monotony of labour  
for

for the mad ventures of war: yes, 'twas I who drew him from the banks of the Gartampe—'twas I who plunged him in toil and peril—'twas I, who urging him on to revenge the injuries of our fallen house, led him headlong unto death."

"Unto death," cried Matilda, and her face waxed as white as her kerechief.

"Perchance," quick resumed Hugh, anxious to assuage her affliction, "'tis my own fears, for nought of confirmation have I found. Flying at the raven-eroak of defeat—for disaster moves on wings—I sought his body midst the slain—I examined each wan and blood-stained visage: ay, and I have followed the *ignis-fatuus* hope, throughout Normandy, throughout France; and I have chased it hither into England, and assuming the Proteus-habit of disguise, and veiling myself from the ken of friend or foe, I have hovered around the courtly circle of our hated enemy John;—and I have played the eaves-dropper,  
but

but alack! I have learned nought of our hapless Walter."

Matilda thought of the hundreds, who, in the loathsome dungeons of king John, had withered beneath the death-blast of his hate, and her tears and her sobs redoubled.

"And yet," pursued Hugh, "despair damps not my ardour; for there is that within," and he struck his hand upon his breast, "which tells me we shall meet again—meet in brighter circumstances—meet on this side heaven!"

"God grant it!" aspirated Matilda, and the known escape of the captured earl de la Marche, buoyed her with the like hope.

"The changes and the chances of war," continued Hugh, "called us to opposite stations. I had found my brother, to lose him, wellnigh, as soon as found: for weeks, for months, we knew nought of each other—yet we strove in the same cause—we fought for the same  
benefice;

benefice: king John was the common enemy; he had trampled on every law, moral and divine, and a host arose to crush him in his vauntings. Belike, 'twas to try our faith, that disaster and mischance prevailed: the conflagration of our fleet in the harbour of Damme, marred our projected invasion of England; the treacherous capture of the earl de la Marche, deprived us of a bold and brave leader; and the overthrow of prince Louis, spread wide and universal dismay. We——”.

“When at Nantes,” fearfully interrogated Matilda, all her thoughts resting on her father, “could you gather nought of clue?—could you trace nought to cast light on the mystery?”

“Alas, no!” replied Hugh. “At the first rumour of defeat I hastened to Nantes—I questioned of my gallant brother—I heard of his intrepidity, of his heroic exploits, but I heard no further. Upon the teeming field of slaughter, I  
found



found one, as anxious, and as diligent as myself; one, not impelled by blood, but impelled by the oftentimes firmer tie of faith and gratitude!"

As he spoke, he glanced at his companion in the boat; and Matilda, reading the language of his eye, beheld that sharer of his persevering toil, half burying his face in his breast, as though zealous to hide his quick and fluctuating emotion.

"The friend of my dear father!" she pronounced.

The stranger looked up; the starting tear, and the gladsome smile, lightening up his features, seemed, as the sun in spring, tending on the shower.—"Not so, by the powers!" he exclaimed—"The servant, lady, not the friend."

"Ay, and the friend, as well as the servant, my good O'Carroll," exclaimed Hugh; "for however principle frames the practice of obedience, the heart speaks in the offices of love. But hush!  
hush!"

hist ! yonder is our rallying-point ;” and he pointed to a kind of beacon-light twinkling in distance.

“ Dear sir, whither would you bear me ?” questioned Matilda. “ Why from my late home ?—why from the hospitable abode of the baron de Cantilupe ?”

“ I would bear thee from the reach of Savary de Mauleon,” answered Hugh. “ Knowest thou not, that locks, nor bolts, nor aversion, nor discretion, can stay the tide of passion ? List to me, my fair niece. Savary de Mauleon has marked thee for his own : and, by the eternal God, sooner will I mourn thee dead, than know thee the victim of Savary de Mauleon !”

Matilda cast a timid look at her uncle ; there was a wild fire in his eye, and a death-frown on his brow ; he gnawed his lip, and he seemed to wrestle against the war within.

“ Matilda,” he resumed, in a voice low and stern, “ thy future dwelling  
may

may lack the luxuries of thy late dwelling; but not all the bloodhounds of Savary de Maulcon can scent the track I'll lead thee. Fear not; stanch and firm hearts shall hem thee in from wrong, and the gentlest of the gentle will bear thee fellowship."

"The child of my dead master! the child of my lost master!" shouted the joyous O'Carroll. "Ay, by St. Patrick, lady, and we will fight for thee to the death!"

As the boat neared the shore, the uneasiness and repugnance of Matilda redoubled; her strange flight, and stranger absence, might be misconstrued; mystery might be tortured into guilt: and as the suspense and sorrow of the gentle Millicent, when returning, she should seek her in vain, gnawed like a scorpion-sting on her spirits, tears again flooded her eyes, and again she turned imploringly to her uncle—"Think—think, dear sir," she urged, "when the  
baron,

baron, when the lady Millicent, shall learn my absence; when—when——”

“Neither thy feelings, thy gratitude, nor thy discretion, shall be impeached,” said Hugh. “This night, before I sleep, I will report of thee to the baron de Cantilupe. Trust in me, Matilda; a little exertion, a little courage, and all will be well.” And as he spoke, he lifted her from the boat, and drew her arm carefully within his own.

The moon was half hid in clouds; a few scattered stars twinkled in the dark canopy of heaven, and the night-wind, rustling midst the high branches of the overhanging trees, sounded as the death plaint of some mourning spirit. The path into which they struck, overgrown with moss and lichens, and close hedged in with brambles, and ivy, and other parasitical plants, twining, and creeping, and trailing, and holding in the dampness, led direct from the water's edge: it was intricate and lonely; and though  
from

from earliest infancy, Matilda had joyed in

“The wonderful, the wild,”

her heart now misgave her; her cheek grew pale, and her hand trembled as it lay in that of her uncle's, for she felt as though the crisis of her fate approached.

“We live in a season when heroism becomes even thy gentle sex,” observed Hugh, anxious to while away the time, and to divert from the gloom of reflection—“a season, which calls aloud for energy and for courage. Here we are safe, because the emissaries of our mortal foe guess not our hiding-place; here ———”

“Alas! and should they guess it—and should they discover it?” asked the terrified girl.

“Why then will they discover a hornet's nest; ay, and every hornet's sting, will bear a tenfold death.”

Matilda shuddered—she looked up—  
she

she met the eyes of her uncle fixed steadfastly upon her. He paused as though to listen; he cast a searching glance around: O'Carroll was far behind, and not the breath of sound tokened of human being. "I would bear thee back to the banks of the Gartampe, to the hours of relaxation and confidence," he resumed, again slowly advancing—"I would learn all thy knowledge of the past. Matilda"—and he bent his lip wellnigh to her ear, and he dropped his voice, so that the tone was rather felt than heard—"what thought thy father of these troubled times?—what said thy father of the malversations of a royal ruler?"

"Those storms which wreck the peace of kingdoms, reached not our cottage," said Matilda. "Knowest thou not, dear sir, the blast which fells the lordly oak, harms not the shrubs and flowerets at its base?"

"But of the storm which blew thy  
VOL. III. D father

father from his rich inheritance?—of the rich inheritance from which thy father fled?” eagerly questioned Hugh. “Tell me, Matilda, knowest thou not the feud, the deadly feud, which drove thy father into exile?”

“No, on my life,” replied Matilda. “I know my father, a man of sorrows, bruised, bleeding, with wrongs and woe; a man——”

“Not his name—knowest thou not his name?” interrupted the wondering Hugh.

“I know my father,” rejoined Matilda, “as the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux: and though my heart oft told me, he was not always so; as the secret of my father, it befoyed me not to pry.”

“Saints and martyrs!” ejaculated Hugh, “what, misered all his sorrows—buried all his mighty wrongs! Like inward fires raging beneath the flower-dappled earth, smothered the huge catalogue

logue within his own breast, and wore the cheating smiling surface of content! Oh, Walter! oh, my brother!" and he bowed his face, and the quickness of his respiration, and the fast fading and flushing of his cheek, spoke the violence of his emotion. Suddenly reviving, and grasping tight her hand—"Knowest thou aught of the De Lacey's?" he asked—"knowest thou aught of the lord of Ulster?"

"Ay, and of the lord of Meath also," said Matilda. "I have heard of wrongs, and indignities, and violence—I have heard the lady Millicent say——"

"Of Walter—of my brother," interrupting her. "Say, child, hast thou ever heard thy father speak of the lords of Ulster and of Meath?"

"Never," answered Matilda. "My father, as though hurrying from himself, would toil until sleep tended on exhausted nature. If he recalled times past, he would fall into such fearful paroxysms,



that life and sanity were often threatened. Once"—and the night preceding the departure of Walter from the cottage flashed on memory—"he spoke of high descent, of the pride of ancestry, of the calamities of a noble house: but his manner was ambiguous, his language hard to guess at. He told me, amidst all the stress and changes of the world—should God so will it—safety lay in borrowed mediocrity; that amidst temptation, spite of the impelling goad of pride and conscious greatness, the gardener of the white monks of Cîteaux must be the sole acknowledged calling of my father. He told me——" She ceased, for a loud rustling among the trees, and the sound of voices, tokened of intruders.

"Another season," whispered Hugh, and then he hurried forward.

"Who passes?" demanded a voice. "What ho! speak quickly: whither comest thou?—whither goest thou?"

"What's

“What’s that to thee?” said Hugh — “I speed on my own errand.”

“Then by our Lady, and thou shalt speed in goodly fellowship!” quick rejoined the voice; “for much mine ears belie me, if thou art not a friend.”

“Ay, marry am I, my lord Theobald de Verdon! and I will bear thee consort straight to my lady Margaret.” And then he withdrew himself from the arm of Matilda, and spoke aside, in a tone, low and earnest.

The conference over, he quick returned, and resuming his station beside his niece, and joined by De Verdon, and by the companion of De Verdon’s night stroll, they advanced together.

“’Tis a dark night, and a rough track, lady,” said the unarmed knight, moving at the side of Matilda; “a track, forsooth, little fashioned for gentleness and beauty; but it leads to a goodly haven, and anon, comfort and security will prevail.”

Matilda started: the accent was familiar; it thrilled on memory; it tokened of other days: she looked up; she gazed steadfastly in the face of the speaker; but the deep gloom of night, together with his muffling cloak and slouched bonnet, precluded the chance of recognition. His form was tall; his movement dignified; disguise spoke in his dun habit; for though no plume waved o'er his brow, the lance and the helm seemed as his native appertenances. "Strange," thought Matilda; and then she watched to catch again that voice, for aught appertaining to the past, brought with it, thrilling hope, and wild and calculating conjecture.

The path, narrow and broken, and overrun with briars and low brushwood, suddenly opened upon a heathy plain, then winding along the sedgy borders of a deep morass, and striking anew into forest-shade, it toiled up a steep ascent, and closed in a dark and turreted building.

ing. The lord Theobald de Verdon stepped forward, and thrice knocking at a low postern, and thrice blowing a shrill blast on the impending horn, the bolts and the stanchcons were withdrawn, and the postern opened. Crossing a paved court-yard, and threading a passage, long and cold, from the extreme of darkness and discomfort, they quick passed into a chamber, warm and large, and fashioned for luxurious ease: lights burned in massy silver sconces, and huge stems of pine and fir crackled on the hearth.

“ Ah, so soon! so very soon! Welcome! thrice welcome!” And a form, light as any fairy, a face, smiling and glowing with roses,

“ By nature’s sweet and cunning hand laid on;”  
with

“ Raven hair, playing round her neck,  
Like tendrils of the vine,”

met them in the door-way.

“ Not too soon, my Margaret ?” asked De Verdon ; then leading her, all beamy as she was, to the spirit-worn Matilda—  
“ The fair niece of our friend Hugh,” he pursued. “ Be thy gentleness, my love, the pledge of our hospitality.”

Matilda smiled on the salutation of her lovely hostess, and casting aside her muffling guise, looked anxiously up, at the sudden exclamation of him, whose voice had before struck on her ear, like long forgotten dreams. It was the lord George de Cantilupe—he, who in the moment of peril, when the little cell of the sisters of St. Claire was in flames, had rescued her from the loose ribaldry and insult of the soldiery ; who under the escort of Adam Morley, had speeded her to England—had consigned her, all drooping as she was with care and grief, to the kindly offices of the good and the tender Millicent ! Bright and beauteous was the glow on her cheek, was the fire in her eye : it was gratitude, it was  
friendship,

friendship, the “solace and splendour of private life,” which burned on her cheek—which lived in her eye—which imparted to every perfect feature, a light almost ethereal. She stretched forth her hand—she smiled the heart-greeting of gladness: and the smile, and the glow, and the graciousness of that flitting moment, lived until death, in the heart of him who had been her rescuer!

But though Matilda breathed all the joy of welcome—though she listened to and imparted all that had passed since the hour of parting—still the presence and the congratulations of the brother chased not the image of the sister. The distress and the suspense inflicted on the lady Millieent preyed on her spirits; and not until a speedy messenger, simply notifying her safety, was dispatched to the temporary abode of the baron de Cantilupe, could she feel herself justified in sharing the comforts and security of her new home: even then, though appeased

and wooed into content, though attracted and charmed by the playful sallies of beauty and innocence, though enriched with the blessing of her uncle, long after she had retired to rest, did wonder and conjecture chase away sleep. The baron de Cantilupe knew not the contiguity of his son : and how could she, a novice in the crooked policy of plans and practice, reconcile that son's professions of filial love and honour with his seeming lack of confidence and candour ?—how could she resolve a mystery, thick and imperious to older and more experienced eyes ?—how could she descry the dark and subtle web, woven in the quickening loom of spiritual authority, spreading throughout the land, and linking in one sworn bond of confederation and amity ?

Perhaps, in the iron register of ages gone by, there cannot be traced a period, in which existing circumstances gave fairer colour to rebellion, in which the malver-

malversations of the monarch, more gradually, and more effectually, divorced the subject from allegiance. The characteristic love of Englishmen for fellowship and order, long stayed the fate-fraught flame destined to cleanse and purify the tainted sway of mad distempered power:—it was the systematic oppression, the galling insolence, the cold tyranny of the reigning prince, his imbecility, his waywardness, and his vices, which alone could have goaded all classes of men to the desperate hazard of revolt:—it was the exactions, the subtlety, the pusillanimity of the base and degenerate John, which gathered against himself, a combination, so firm, and so powerful. And it did gather, and it did extend, far as the realm of Britain: thousands harboured it unseen; thousands cherished it unsuspected: and whilst sleep vivifies the strength, and sheds balm on the worn spirit of Matilda, try we to explain, the seeming incongruity,



which, from the soldier of king John, metamorphosed the lord George de Cantilupe, into an abettor and aider of the hostile party.

Although habit be designated second nature, still habit warped not the judgment and perception of De Cantilupe in the dull muffle of prejudice: for whilst his father, blindly and mechanically trod in the one line of conformity and order, diverging from the beaten track, he dared to see and to question, to sift the motives, to call to account the actions, to class as one, the deeds of the monarch and the man: and wofully did king John lose in the just balance; wofully did he fall short of the allotted standard. Blood and outrage spoke his rule; ruin and desolation spread through the wide expanse of his government: his favours were lavished on the panders of his pleasure; and even those favours bought at the dear price of integrity and honour, were shallow and fickle as himself!

Often

Often would De Cantilupe muse and shudder at the obduracy of guilt, at the wild and monstrous tales which rumour bandied. In vain would he struggle down the storm of just indignation, would he try to palliate, on the trite score of temptation and of human weakness: the stubborn facts of defalcation and crime baffled habitual fealty; and even when, as a vassal to the crown, he led on his father's followers, and crossed into Normandy, it was more to rend back the foreign possessions of his country, than to aid in the feeble efforts of a supine and slothful king. Thus prepared, was it marvel, that the seeds of disaffection, sown by the hand of friendship, should take root and spread; that the arguments and the persuasions of the lord Eudo de la Zouch, should stamp it virtue, to aid in the struggles of an enslaved and groaning people? Where'er he turned, as though aimed at the seat of expiring loyalty, some victim  
to

to the wrath and vengeance of king John presented itself. Chance, in the short-lived peace, hastily patched through the interference of the apostolic see, conducted him to the death-scene of the injured William baron de Brauze. He saw him at Paris, in the church of St. Genevieve, surrounded by the regular canons of St. Austin, gasping forth life on the hard bed of charity: and as he marked the struggles and the agony of this miserable relic of a whole family—as he listened to the tale of persecution and exile—as he recalled the lingering death of the hapless wife and children—as he mused on the dire vengeance which had dealt the universal destruction, and saw the earth close o'er the sad remains; he felt it were worse than blindness, to uphold the tyrant, in simple homage to the king;—he felt that the crimes and injustice of a king, weakening and dissolving the common bond of obligation, in violating the coronation oath, violated also the sworn faith and fealty of the subject.

His return to England changed not the bent of his feelings, for he found all England groaning beneath the exactions and turpitude of her ruler; and yet he respected the early prejudices of his father, and he visited and quitted Heringworth without betraying his aberration. The convocation of the nobles, under colour of a religious pilgrimage to St. Edmund's-bury, bore him into those dangers, so fatally tending on example: and whilst the baron his father, journeyed to London, to pay homage to the king, accompanied by the lord Eudo de la Zouch, he stood in the midst of the malecontent nobles; and he listened to the vigorous declamations of the archbishop of Canterbury, to his glowing arguments, to his strong exhortations for firmness and unanimity, to his pathetic view of the widely extending misery, to his fatal prescience of utter slavery and future ruin, until every nursery prejudice, like thistle-beard before the wind, vanished, and yielding himself to the  
service

service of reform, his heart and his arm felt braced with nerves of iron.

Separating and diverging on secret embassies, all tending to the one great point, combining things flowed prosperously: *dépôts* of arms were in every corner of the kingdom; large bodies of men, bound unto death, needed but the rallying signal to spring from their hiding-places; foreign princes pledged themselves to the enterprise, and waited but the ripening moment for action. Love too, mighty love, yielded to the fiercer fire of patriotism: for although the lady Millicent sojourned within the precincts of the court, to claim subsidies at the hand of his father, sir Eudo de la Zouch hurried into Derbyshire:—and the lord George de Cantilupe, furthering and aiding in the ripening plot, and shrinking from recognisance, shared the lone haunt of the lord Theobald de Verdon; and mixing with the grave and the gay, with the choice spirits close bound

bound in one adventurous party, although the "purple light of love," from the bright eyes of Matilda, had shed its honeyed poison on his feelings—and although his heart craved for the bliss of her society—still, in the holy cause of liberty and prosperity to man, maintaining the firm principles of his oath, he resolved, be the path ever so rugged, to desert it and life together.

## CHAPTER IV.



"True love measures not with the cold world's gage;  
Scorning the blinding lure of wealth and birth,  
And aiming at the wiser prize of peace,  
True love, in gentleness and modest worth,  
Extracts the treasure, richer far than gold!"

THE morning dawned in brightness, and Matilda, starting from balmy slumber, looked up, and beheld the wakeful Margaret at her side.

"So

“ So late ? ” she asked. “ Sure, sleep has cozened me into forgetfulness, of this world, and this world’s claims.”

“ Not so,” said Margaret; “ but mine has been a couch of care. Alack ! my spirits sicken as the hour for action advances, and my scared heart flies from the gloom of its own reflections.”

“ Meanest thou,” demanded Matilda, “ that misfortune threatens ? or breathest thou the mere plaint of jaundiced fancy ? ”

“ I mean,” quick rejoined Margaret, “ that the livelong night has been given to conference instead of rest ; that in the gloom and stillness of midnight, messengers have sought my husband, and that now, in broad day, he is closeted in close debate. Hist ! hist ! ” for again the horn thrice sounded, and horse-hoofs were heard in the court-yard below.—

“ I am a sad heroine,” pursued Margaret, striving to smile ; “ and yet my  
Theobald

Theobald oft warned me of a soldier's perils."

"Belike thou wert incredulous," observed Matilda: "experience, lady, is worth a mourt of precept."

"God wot, I have had experience and precept too!" replied Margaret: "from the earliest dawn of first remembrance, mystery and vicissitude have been my fortune."

Matilda gazed on her with a sister's feeling.—"Then are we alike fashioned to the office of condolence," she said; and she stretched forth her hand, and tears sprung in her eyes.

Margaret wept also.—"If De Verdon could see me, he would chide these tears. In truth, 'tis weak and childish: but there are seasons, when the whole weight of the past presses on memory, and seems but the prelude to future ill. I oft warned De Verdon that he was wedding himself to misfortune; but he  
would



would not heed me : and now, forsooth ! he pays for his temerity."

"Thine was not the form to scare, lady," said Matilda, gazing on the young and beauteous creature before her.

A vivid blush passed o'er the cheek of Margaret.—"De Verdon took me portionless and unknown," she resumed. "Unlike thee, I have no uncle, no relative. Should I lose De Verdon, I lose my world"—and she sank on a settle as she spoke, and yielded to her tears.

"What alone—quite alone?" asked Matilda : and Margaret—for the same Margaret it was, who, at the death-scene of Symmachus O'Chahargy, in the lone tower at Angers, passed into the guardianship of Walter—took up the thread of her eventful story. Briefly did she sketch the years of infancy passed at Carentan among the nuns of St. Ursuline ; for until called into the busy strife of human frailty and human woe, her sum of life had been as a summer's day,  
balmy

balmy and bright, unmixed with storm and passion.

“ Perhaps it were other than content,” she remarked—“ for content is scarce of earth—with which I marked the deep dead calm around ; with which I joined in the psalmody of praise, and aided in all the pious rites of my cloister-home. Sometimes my hopes strangely warred with my station—I pictured a world beyond my boundary wall ; and often did I ponder, whether, like the shrubs and flowers in the convent garden, I was destined, to bud, to blossom, and to die, unseen.”

“ It was the sameness—it was the dull monotony of your days, which engendered restlessness and disquiet,” observed Matilda. “ Youth, dear lady, craves after change ; youth is the season of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm spurns the muffle of restraint.”

“ Life itself is a strange wild dream,” continued Margaret—“ I ought to have  
been

been happy, because I knew not the shadow of grief or care. Alas! I was forewarned; for oft did the holy sisters tell me, in the world, I should know grief and care."

"And yet," said Matilda, "thou wouldst not exchange thy present lot, for all the peace-yielding indifference of the past."

"No! oh no!" fervently exclaimed Margaret, "not for a millennium of bliss, would I be other than the wife of De Verdon! 'Tis that love, that fond, that ardent love, the better part of my being which makes my cares so keen and piercing; 'tis fears for his safety, 'tis doubts of the present calling, which plant my pillow with thorns."

"Hope is the brightest gift of God to man," said Matilda, anxious to soothe and to assure—"hope, in a just cause, pilots through a sea of storm. But I pray, proceed, dear lady; I would speed thee back to Carentan."

"The

“The hour of my removal from Carentan,” resumed Margaret, “strongly testifies the inconsistency of human nature. It was the hour I had pined for—the hour I had ceaselessly petitioned by my daily and nightly prayers: and yet, though claimed by a supposed father at the hands of the lady abbess, that hour found me sobbing and crying in the arms of the nuns; that hour——”

“It tokens rather the tenderness of human feeling,” interrupted Matilda; “for cold is the heart, which clings not to the ties of first impression.”

“From our departure from Carentan,” pursued Margaret, “I date a new era of my being; for vicissitude grew out of change, and soon, from the listlessness of ease, did I indeed plunge into the griefs and cares of the world. Him I looked to as my father, was drooping with inward ailment: the slave and victim of hidden grief, his life was given to penitence and woe. I saw him sinking  
ing

ing without the power to rescue—I saw him bleeding without the power to heal: craving endless change, as though willing to fly from the curse of remembrance, we sought in novelty some alleviation from disquiet: but alas! where the mind yields not its own palliative—where the resource lives not within—vain and vague are the hopes of peace. Whole volumes could I fill, were I to enumerate half the restlessness of his feelings: sometimes he would tax himself with injustice; sometimes, with heinous crime: then he would bid me pray for his after peace; and then, waving me from him, he would bid me fly, as I valued his senses. Through all the changes of our fitful fortune, one valued and faithful friend remained; in poverty, in privation, and in despair, Conner O'Carroll aided us with his best and ablest efforts. The slave of impulse and of feeling, to him I owe all the brightest rays in my chequered destiny: for he,

he, in the mortal extremity of disease and woe—when at Angers, alone, neglected, destitute, stripped by robbers, and shut away from friends; when death weighed heavy on the strength of the wretched O'Chahargy—piloted to our miserable haunt, your father, and my hereafter guardian!"

"My father!" ejaculated Matilda; and with eyes swimming in tears, with a heart throbbing with a thousand contending feelings, she listened to a recital, which each moment, quickened the love and the reverence she owed him.

"Alike our friend! our father!" pronounced Margaret, stretching forth her arms, and wooing Matilda to a sisterly embrace: "alike may we mourn his loss; alike may we pray for his safety. In the court of the duchess Constantia," she resumed, after a long pause, "I first beheld De Verdon. 'Twas then—'twas there, I owned, I felt, that without love,

creation is a blank, life a burden ; 'twas then—'twas there——”

“ First of my father,” importuned Matilda—“ Dearest lady, you know not how my heart craves after some knowledge of my father.”

A soft blush mantled the fair face of Margaret, and a feeling of self-reproach lived in her eye.—“ Your pardon,” she implored—“ I forgot, in the egotism of love, the prior claim of gratitude and friendship. Your father, pitying my orphan state, consigned me to the care of the duchess Constantia; then, panting to give me a sister, to conduct you to the same kindly sanctuary, attended by O'Carroll, he quitted Angers, to seek you in your distant home.”

Margaret paused, for Matilda's heart felt sick, and her cheek faded to clay : the agony, the wild cry of her father, when seeking her, he found the cottage desolate, pierced from her ear to her soul.—“ Virgin Mother !” she aspirated,  
“ that

“that moment ! that pang, keener than death itself !” Then struggling down her feelings, and turning, earnestly, wistfully to Margaret—“ I can picture all,” she said—“ Tell me, I beseech you, tell me, of the return of my father to Angers ?”

“ His stay was brief,” rejoined Margaret : “ he returned to Angers to tell of his disappointment ; then wedding himself to the service of France, devoting himself to war and vengeance, espousing the cause of the murdered prince Arthur, and still followed and attended by the faithful O’Carroll, he plunged into all the strifes and turmoils of party. We heard of his exploits and his temerity at the siege of the castle of Loches ; of his aiding Philip Augustus in his victorious strides through Flanders ; and last of all, attached to the immediate train of the earl of Dreux, we heard of him, and we lost him, at the bridge at Nantes.”

“ O’Carroll,” repeated Matilda, thought-



fully—"said you not, O'Carroll tended my dear father in all his perils?"

"Ay, truly, did I," replied Margaret. "The warm-hearted O'Carroll in the turret at Angers, amid mystery and death, anchored his faith and his hopes, on the fortunes of our preserver Walter."

Matilda smothered down a sigh.—"Anon will I question O'Carroll," she said: "and now, lady, of the lord Theobald de Verdon."

Margaret smiled.—"Will you grant ear to a love story?" she asked; "or, will you, by intuition, fancy all the doubts and hopes of passion?"

"Not so; 'tis too subtle a labyrinth to unreave. Said you not, I pray you, in the court of the duchess Constantia, you first met the lord Theobald de Verdon?"

"I met him amid strife and death," said Margaret; "almost in the heart of battle. He came on embassy from the viscount de Thouars; and by him we  
heard

heard the capture of the earl de la Marche, the destruction of our fleet in the harbour at Damme, and the advance of the English, led on by king John in person. From that eventful period, scarce can I give date to our perplexities and dangers: alternately did we seek refuge in Britany, in Normandy, in France; scudding like drifting winds before the tempest; harassed with fears, and tortured with hydra ills. Yet midst the fiercest fires of a warring world—midst all the struggles of jealousy and rancour—Love scattered his brightest flowers, and dipped his barb in sweetest balm! God-wot! it was neither my fortitude nor my heroism which won upon the heart of Dé Verdon! Forsooth! he thought the poor, scared, trembling thing, needed a warrior-helptest; and he singled me out from all the maidens, who moved in the train of the royal Constantia. I told him the tale of my desolation, the strange mystery which

involved my birth and name: and he loved me the better: and oft would he tell me, that his name, and his heritage, would be the brighter, and the richer, in my participation. Yes"—and her cheeks glowed, and her eyes beamed with gratitude and love—"spite of mystery and poverty, De Verdon made me his bride! In the sight of the lady Constantia, Heaven sanctified our vows: and now—now—tell me, Matilda, can I prize him too highly?—can I love him too dearly? From the hour which gave us a world in each other," she pursued, after a brief pause, "my cares and my fears assumed a new form. I trembled at the blast of war, at the threat of violence—I trembled not for myself, but for him—I felt that his life was my life; that bereaved of De Verdon, all that this world could class as blessings, would be unprofitable and vain. Doubtless," and she forced a smile, "the pious sisters at Carentan would call me idolatrous and sinful;

sinful; but my heart acquits me of the charge, for could I love him less, should I not be ungrateful?"

"Love," timidly observed Matilda, "like every other passion of the soul, unless controlled by reason; love—love——" she ceased, and trembled.

"Tarry until you are a wife," said Margaret, feelingly: "now, I cannot listen to your hypothesis."

Matilda thought of the palmer, and her very temples flushed the wild colouring of emotion.—"A wife!" she echoed, and then she hung down her head to hide her feelings.

The voice of De Verdon calling upon Margaret in the corridor, stayed aught of further observation or inquiry: it was a talismanic voice; for since in paradise, the first Eve, moved, blessing and blessed, never did woman's form harbour a more gentle or submissive spirit—never did woman's heart cling firmer to her wedded lord! She loved him,

“ With that excellence,  
That angels love good men with”—

loved him with all the strength and fervour of her nature—loved him, even to the martyrdom of her own repose; for happiness dwelt not in her bosom: alas! how could happiness dwell in her bosom, when, like the gentle Belvidera, she knew her Jaffier, tangled, toiled, in all the deep dark snares of death-provoking treason!

Frequent egress and ingress, and deep commune, and close debate, filled many days, succeeding the arrival of Matilda in the lone abode of the lord Theobald de Verdon. There, unnoted, did she trace the fevered workings of busy speculating spirits, panting for engagement and for enterprise:—there, did wily caution, in the three blasts of the horn, proclaim the extension and the import of the signal;—for even in the midnight darkness, when all of peace and innocence was hushed, when the wrapt world

was lost in deep forgetfulness, would the horn, rallying from slumber, stamp the restless colour of conspiracy—would the quick step, and smothered whisper, shew that—

“ Between the acting of a dreadful thing,  
And the first motion,  
The genius, and the mortal instruments,  
Are oft in council.”

Wide, then, as north from south, as east from west, spread the huge chain, linking heart and hand in the vast service: yet such is the contradictory compound of our nature, that although Matilda bosomed instinctive hate to the enemy of her house, to the relentless persecutor of her father; although she heard of the injustice, the fraud, and the turpitude of king John—heard his deeds reviled, his name execrated—her woman’s heart quailed at the coming horror; trembled, she scarce knew why, at the thunder-burst, threatening wide and wild destruction. Perhaps it was that innate prin-

ciple within us, which bows to the ruling authority ; which, in the emphatic language of St. Paul, impels us, for conscience and for religion's sake, to " render tribute to whom tribute is due ; custom to whom custom ; fear to whom fear ; honour to whom honour." Certain it is, her mind and her feelings were restless and ill at ease : she recalled the scathing flames, sweeping from earth, the hapless harmless sisters of St. Claire ; and she shuddered, lest, here in England, beings, as hapless, and as harmless, should fall the bleeding victims to contending party.

Often, as though the sport of accident, did she find herself alone with the lord George de Cantilupe ; now pacing the matted corridors ; now, amid the funereal gloom of the deep dark woods ; for the dwelling was so close invested, and the approach so wild and rude, that it seemed fitter fashioned as a resting-place for flesh, than for flesh still tenanted by busy fitful spirits. Often would he bewail

wail the necessity for secrecy and disguise; the emergency, arming man against his fellow: yet would he soften down the horrors and the terrors of her fancy; would he moderate the claims and wishes of the nobles; would he cloak existing things, in dyes, so dark and rayless—the tyranny of the king—the slavery of the subject—the wrongs of individuals—the groans of an outraged land—that starting into heroism, she too would thrill, and call the effort virtue. Often, from the gentle Millicent, would she speak of the baron, and then would she marvel that such a father and such a son were leagued in opposite interests: but there too would De Cantilupe still every doubt of her mind:—his father, too just, and too upright, and too much the friend of human kind, to tolerate oppression, satisfied of the pacific colour of the existing league, of their sworn loyalty, and bounden prayer for reform



and grace, would become the ready convert of truth and equity.

“Tarry until my father remove to Heringworth,” he would exclaim; “and quick apprized of the justness of our intentions, and the reasonableness of our demands, will he lend his name to the schedule, craving the fulfilment of the great charter.” And then diverging from strife and turmoil, would he talk of the peace-yielding bowers of Heringworth, of the joys and the comforts of his hereditary home; would he lead her back to the flower-bespangled banks of the Welland—the far-spreading chase—the picturesque haunts—the thatched roof of Adam Morley, until kindling with the glow of gratitude and friendship, she too would take the thread, and tell of the past, little dreaming she was shedding thorns on the future.

Sometimes he would strive to lure her into the scenes of earliest youth; but from those scenes Matilda would shrink, fearful.

fearful, lest hurried away by feeling, she should divulge where duty urged concealment. Yet as those chequered scenes revived, as faithful memory recalled every fitful variation, would her features emanate the spirit within; would sensibility, like the softest halo, shroud the lustre of her large dark eyes, and spread o'er her cheek, a bloom of vivid beauty:—and De Cantilupe would bear that witching bloom, freighted with honeyed poison; that downcast look, so eloquent, yet so bashful, deep in the recesses of his own soul:—even in the midnight councils of his colleagues, would her image rise preeminent—would conviction tell him, that without Matilda, however life might be glory, life could not be happiness. Alas! little did he guess the snare weaving for his repose! Full oft, muffled in the sweetest flowers of paradise, do we press unsuspecting upon the shelving steep—do we snatch at the gilded lure, freighted with our  
own

own destruction—do we hug the chain, destined to inthral us unto death! for however true love be pictured, as teeming with doubts, and dreads, and timid fears, encouraged by the secret approval of Hugh, by the known admiration of his own father, by the almost sisterly love of Millicent, the lord George de Cantilupe cherished hope rather than fear, and fanned the spark of early impression, until it grew a lasting flame.

Day succeeded day, and the rich variegations of autumn gradually yielded to the sterile reign of winter: the trees were despoiled of their foliage, and the rough cold blast, sweeping through the long passages, tokened of desolation. Still De Cantilupe dared the fairy circle of love; and still Matilda, unconscious and guileless, fed the aspiring views of passion: gentleness was her native province; and how could the brother of Millicent, experience aught, save gentleness and friendship!

Often,

Often, in the absence of her uncle—for Hugh had quitted the fastness, on some secret and urgent call—would Matilda summon O'Carroll to question of her father; for she loved to listen to the silver sounds of his praise, and she would listen to the language of truth and nature, until every grief seemed light, compared to the grief of his loss. O'Carroll would journey back to Angers: from the earliest moment of introduction, would take the thread—would fight again o'er all his battles—would tell of his exploits, of his noble darings; and then he would marvel, how, upon the cheating shadow of speculation, he could have abandoned the side of his master.

“Sorrow come after it! to think that the foe should steal in at such a season. Sure, 'twas a trap of the devil's own planning, for nought a friar Dennis could I light on.”

“But the motive,” urged Matilda—  
“where

“where the motive be to serve, the consequence entaileth not reproach.”

“By the powers! and it will cover me with reproach to the hour of my death,” rejoined O’Carroll. “I quitted Nantes, with a quick step and a light heart; because, forsooth! I bore friar Dennis in my eye, and the confession of my dead master, wellnigh in my clutches. But friar Dennis, grace be-tide him! led me a chase, so wild and strange, that never a goose-flight was half so crooked. By the rood! and not a cell, an hospital or preceptory, from Nantes, to the water’s edge at Marseilles, escaped my sifting.”

“Doubtless,” said Matilda, “zeal, imparting strength and energy, gave nerve to age. Perchance, the holy man had reached Palestine, ere you started on the calling.”

“I would friar Dennis had moved with a slower motion, though!” resumed O’Carroll, mournfully. “By St. Patrick!”

trick!" and he scared all my strength and all my energy; for when I turned my back upon Marseilles, my spirit was as flat, as any wight's, tangled in the mesh of his own knavery."

"And yet," observed Matilda, "you toiled for others; and though you reaped nought save disappointment, the heart spoke in the service."

"I thought so then," said O'Carroll, "and I would take comfort then; ay, lady, when I reached Nantes, and then all my comfort fled. When I reached Nantes——" He paused, and with the back of his hand, he brushed a tear from his eye; then stifling down a sob — "When I reached Nantes—when I heard of the battle—when I fled to that fatal bridge—I envied every mother's son who lay cold and stiff around me; and as I lingered long, and searched warily, I lighted on a being, as heart-stricken, and as woe-begone as myself. Sure, 'twas the hand of Providence! I lighted

lighted on the own brother of my lost master! And he heard my complaints, and he pitied my self-reproaches: and when he close questioned, I confessed how that I had fled in search of one friar Dennis; and I told him all the mishap which had fallen out in my absence; and he took me into his service, and he brought me forthwith to England, and many a sorry league have we traversed together, and many a peril have we shared! And here, in this wilderness, the beautiful lady of the lord Theobald de Verdon, turns out to be the same sweet Margaret, who cost me such a mort of tears, in the lone tower at Angers! And you—you, lady;" and he caught her hand, and raised it with heartfelt homage to his lips—"you, lady, the dear lamented child of the brave good Walter! Oh! when I saw you step into the boat, had I known you the child of my lost master; then—then, lady——But stranger as you were,

by

by the powers! my hand tingled to be after trundling the precious knave into the Thames: and but for my master, who frowned me into quiet, I had done him some mortal wrong. ‘O’Carroll,’ said he, ‘all depends upon cold caution: seek vengeance on the pander, and the principal escapes.’ And so I swallowed down my rage: but had I guessed you the child of Walter—holy St. Patrick! he might as well have toyed with a hungry tiger.”

“Sure, ’twas the interposition of Heaven,” exclaimed the grateful Matilda, shuddering at the peril she had escaped, “which foiled art with art—which led such friends to the rescue!”

“My master Hugh,” quick resumed O’Carroll, “scented out the mischief-plot, in one of his chance-wanderings from this very tarrying point. He overheard the young varlet, beardless in years, but a very greybeard in sin, tampering with a cormorant boatman: and  
—  
they



they cavilled, and squabbled, and parted, forsooth ! for a trumpery mark : and because he ferreted out ruin, and wrong, and treachery ; and heard, how a rich noble, all for love of a fair lady, had put on a false beard and a torn gabardine, and played the wandering minstrel ; and how, that he found her on the banks of the Thames, when he thought her far away in France ; and how that he was stirring heaven and earth to trap her in his power : so hiding his own indignation, forthwith he offered himself in the stead of the boatman, and straight then he came to me.—‘ O’Carroll,’ said he, ‘ I am after blowing up a train of villany. Wilt thou lend me a hand to unkennel the fox ? ’—‘ Ay, and to trap him in his own snare,’ said I. And then we conned the matter over : for my master cared not to press others to the reseue, lest the boy, taking fright, the whole project should be defeated, and the poor victim left open to further wiles :—

wiles :—and so, before sunset, in the boat of the lord Theobald de Verdon, we repaired to the given station, and soon were we joined by the young skip-jack, who thought to beguile us into an evil deed. By the powers! had he guessed us of little Ireland, he might have known we would have fought the devil for the love of dear woman!”

“Humanity and principle, my good O’Carroll,” said Matilda, “is not confined to clime or soil: it lives in the hearts of the brave, and needs but the rallying call of opportunity, to quicken it into action.”

“Ay, arrah, does it, lady! But by holy Patrick, an Irishman thinks of the call first, and the venture after!”

Matilda smiled, for the glow of heart spread o’er the features of O’Carroll. —“Instinctive feeling,” she returned, “binds me alike to Ireland. ’Tis the country of my birth, O’Carroll; and though I quitted it in ignorance and infancy,

fancy, should I e'er return to its sea-girt shore, joyous and bliss-fraught will be the hour."

It was the theme, which to touch upon, was to awaken all the eloquence of O'Carroll; and once, though in speculation, landed upon that sea-girt shore—once in Ireland—once pressing the green sward of his native land, quick, as air or sound, did his heart speed him to the county of Meath—to the barony of Navan—to the hamlet of Ardbraccan: and his mother, and his cousin Norah, and his mud cabin—and well-nigh the trees o'ertopping his mud cabin—were successively recalled. It was a flow of soul, a burst of pictured blessedness, a rapturous indulgence of feeling, which thrilled on his warm heart, and flooded his eyes in tears:—it was that intuition of spirit, that nameless eloquence of nature, which harbours in the breast of the unlettered Indian, as impelling, and as potent, as e'er harboured in the breast of the prince!

The

The season of storm had set in ; the drizzling rain, the nipping hoar-frost, the rough cold blasts of winter : but the like heart of flame, the like “ nerve of fire,” spread through the far-extending league. It was, as the train, long laid, needing but the igniting match of opportunity—Margaret marked it with a sickening spirit—Matilda, with hope and trepidation—Margaret trembled for the safety of her husband—Matilda, in the threatened struggle, augured the benefit of thousands ! Rudely was the calm of a few days broken by the blast of the horn. Matilda looked up, and she saw the lips and cheeks of Margaret tintless : the next instant they were left alone, for De Verdon and De Cantilupe hurried from the chamber.

“ That horn,” faltered Margaret, “ sounds as a death-knell to my spirits. I never hear it, but it seems to bode desertion and despair.”

“ You are too sensitive, too anxious,”  
said

said Matilda. "On my life, you are only fitted for warm suns and soft showers! I marvel much the warrior calling of De Verdon scared not your courage."

Margaret tried to smile, but she was a sad counterfeit, and a tear swam in her eye.—"I am no coward," she replied—"I could brave death for others; ay, Matilda, 'tis for others that I tremble. I know the peril if discovered: the forfeit, the dreadful forfeit, swims before my sight."

"Discovered," repeated Matilda. "As well, dear lady, may you seek to dam a torrent with a silken kerchief. Know you not, injustice strikes at the root of fealty, and severs all the bonds of early custom? Think of our giant strength; think of the mighty store of our resources; think——" She ceased, for De Verdon entered the chamber. His cheeks were flushed; his eyes sparkled with new kindled fire.—"The tyrant struggles

gles in the toil !" he exclaimed. " Firmness and perseverance, and the day becomes our own

" God grant it !" aspirated Margaret.

" The immunity of thousands," pursued De Verdon, yielding to the genial philanthropy of his feelings, " hangs upon our efforts and our deeds. Summoned hence to the council, we go—we toil for the manumission of England."

" What, to the war? Say you, to the war, my Theobald?" asked the terrified Margaret. •

" It may chance so," said De Verdon. " A patriot, dearest, knows no choice, but where his duty calls him ; a patriot ——" The wild cry of Margaret called him back to softer claims than patriotism. She was panting—she was weeping on his arm. " God's truth ! my Margaret," he continued, striving to reassure, " thou art ill fitted for a soldier's bride ! Yet would I not part with thee, love, to be monarch of the universe."

“ No—no, not part,” sobbed Margaret —“ not part, my Theobald : take me with you, and on my life, I will strive for better conduct : ’tis the parting, dear one, which scares away all my courage.”

“ For a brief season,” urged De Verdon : “ a little fortitude, a little resolution, and we will meet anon.”

“ Not for a day—not for an hour ;” and Margaret sprung upon his neck, and hid her fair face in his bosom. “ Take me with you, Theobald, and despair and sorrow cannot reach me ;—oh ! take me with you : let me share the like hardships—let me tread in the like track of peril ; for nought, save parting, can have terrors for me.” As she spoke, she raised her sunny eyes to his face, and the tears which gemmed them, were pure and lovely, as morning dew on the maiden rose-bud. “ Judge not by these pale cheeks and trembling hands,” she resumed. “ Do but smile, love, and trust me, I will play the heroine.”

“ Ay,

“Ay, ever, ever, will I smile on thee,” murmured De Verdon: but not all the dovelike wailings of his Margaret could shake his firmer resolution. She was the dearer solace of his life; and to know her safe, was to give strength and perseverance to duty, was to pour the balm of consolation upon all of possible ill; to know her safe, was to rob misfortune of its keenest barb, was to brace him against all the vicissitudes of capricious chance.

The hour of parting came; for though the day was far spent, and the snow continued falling, and the earth was thick clad in its cold and cheerless livery, still, intrepid in the call of honour, De Verdon and De Cantilupe stayed not a second summons. Perhaps it was the mournful, the heart-rending cries of Margaret, as she hung on the neck of her lord—as she strove in vain to utter the hundred tender charges rising to her lips—which cast a shade,



so sad, on the features of De Cantilupe : for he too lingered in adieu ; he too shrunk from the pang of parting ; he too felt to garner up his hopes, where hopes, alas ! were lost :—and when a sigh swelled the downy bosom of Matilda—when a tear, sacred to another's woe, dimmed the lustre of her eye ; self-love, misconstruing that sigh, that tear ; not for

“ Twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,  
The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold,”

would he have relinquished the cheating bliss-fraught illusion. One long, one last embrace, and almost unmanned in fortitude, De Verdon tore himself from the heart-rived Margaret ; then grasping tight the arm of De Cantilupe, they rushed together from the chamber :—and when, equipped and mounted, they struck into the path, winding down the hill, and piercing midst the forest—speeding to the highest turret, Margaret  
dared

dared the cold rough blast. Fearless  
and wan, she bent o'er the parapet—she  
watched her husband,

“ ——— Till the diminution  
Of space had pointed him as sharp as any needle :  
Nay, follow'd him, till he had melted from  
The smallness of a gnat, to air !”

and then she shrunk away ; and shud-  
dering beneath the first-felt cold, cast  
herself on the bosom of Matilda, and  
yielded to her sorrow.

CHAPTER V.  
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“ The times, fitful and dark,  
And fashioned to the plots and deeds of blood,  
Rouses from dull and drowsy slumber;  
Stings the galled spirit, and  
Wages war with courtesy.”

THE spirit of joy, the soul of contentment, seemed fled with De Verdon and his associates : deeper and heavier grew the gloom of the still dark mansion ; for anxiety strewed her thorns, and grief her mildew. In vain the tender Margaret strove for the mastery of feeling ; in vain she sought to rally into hope—hope, and life, and energy, were gone : busy imagination conjured nought save horror ; for every morning dawned in dread, every night closed in uncertainty : to sleep, was to awaken with wild starts  
—to

—to wake, was to steep her lonely couch in tears of sorrow. Alas! it was a blank, a fearful blank, in her short life: she lived but in the presence of De Verdon—and in the absence of De Verdon, cold grief, and ceaseless care, banqueted on the roses of her cheek, and turned her bliss to mourning. What was it, that Matilda augured return—that she pictured hope and coming peace, until her own pure bosom harboured the cherub comforter, until the discomfiture of tyranny, and the rending wide the dungeons of king John, conjured the possible bliss of a father's rescue: and O'Carroll too; he prophesied a victory; he talked of the stripes and buffetings of war, like one skilled in the harsh science; he enumerated the shifts and the hazards, the 'scapes and the chances, with a fancy, so light and fertile, that all the death-black broodings of possible ill, seemed to scud before his predictions of security.

“What boots it,” he would exclaim,

glancing at the care-worn Margaret, and eloquent in the true philosophy of nature, "whether the storm reach us on land or sea? 'The same hand ruleth over all things! Good, my lady, but for the lack of faith, St. Peter had not sunk, when he strode the waters."

Margaret looked up; she tried to smile on her warm-hearted reprover; but hers was a wan and wintry smile—for the instant it relaxed her features, but it sprung not from her heart.—"We are all deficient, wofully deficient," she murmured—"The Power, who wills, knows best when to deal the blow."

"Arrah, lady! but thy tears and thy wailings savoureth as though the blow were already dealt," quick rejoined O'Carroll. "Now, by holy church, I should fear, like unto St. Peter, to call down the judgment! Oft, in the confession chair, have I heard, how faith is the best hold of man; how it carries him through all the crooked paths of this bad world,

world, and lights him at the last, amid green hills and fruitful pastures!"

"Faith and good works," observed Margaret: "the one, correctly estimated, is inseparable from the other; for faith anchors in heaven, and purifies all the thoughts of earth."

"Belike, and it may bear me safe to Ardraccan," eagerly resumed O'Carroll. "By the blessed apostles, if ever I kiss Irish ground, I will toil, barefooted and bareheaded, to Mellifont Abbey, and seek father Dennis, dead or alive!"

The name of father Dennis awakened new thoughts and new feelings in the breast of Margaret; it recalled the death-scene of O'Chahargy—the mystery enveloping her own birth—the strange dark woof, close shrouding all her destiny.—"Father Dennis," she repeated; "Virgin Mother! worlds would I give to behold that holy man!"

"I would I had just stepped on board the first boat, and followed him to Palestine!"

lestine!" said O'Carroll. . " Peradventure, by this time, I had been after catching him: but grief betide me, I am always blundering and dabbling in troubled waters! My poor mother, rest her bones, living or dead! used to say— 'Conner, thou hast a good heart, lad: but for thy head, 'tis hollow as any drum.' Alack! alack! had I but speeded on to Palestine, I might have cast down my own burden at the blessed sepulchre, and borne away a mort of service to my friends. I might——"

"And you might have toiled and died," feelingly interrupted Margaret; "and then, O'Carroll, I had had one friend the less."

"God prosper thee, lady, for those sweet words! 'Tis a blessed recompence, forsooth! I would I had earned it better! But now, by the holy Trinity! now, will I abide with ye, and serve ye, and watch over ye, and fight for ye, to the death: ay, and should e'er the scent  
of

of friar Dennis cross my pathway, may I blear the name of Conner O'Carroll, and be branded for a common thief, if I do not be after tracking him, e'en to the mouth of St. Patrick's purgatory !'

A whole week had waned on the absence of De Verdon, and still no tidings of return or safety : every moment was leadened ; every hour was an age : a deathlike, a terrifying forebodence, hung upon the spirits of Margaret ; wailing and woe, sounding in the night-wind, seemed as the prognostics of coming ill. Sometimes she saw him pierced and bleeding in the field ; then would sickly imagination, ever busy in self-torture, conjure the block and the axe, and all the dismal paraphernalia of death and woe, until sensibility—in one, our blessing and our curse—would goad well-nigh to frenzy. Now, she would start—she would seek him o'er the face of the troubled land : danger nor difficulty should stay her progress ; she would



pierce midst the councils of the disaffected; she would claim him at the hands of the primate himself:—anon, a very woman, she would sink, panting and weeping, on the bosom of Matilda. —“ Life—life,” she murmured, as she watched a sickly moon, now dipping, now emerging from a canopy of clouds —“ what is life? At best, a brief season, made up of sufferings, cares, sorrows, tears, perplexities, privations, vain labours, disappointments, sacrifices; toiling through old age, and closing in the tomb!”

“ Thou dost indeed steep all below in ebon die,” observed Matilda: “ rather, be it the colour of thy own feelings which spreads the death-shroud.”

“ Sophocles tells us,” pursued Margaret, “ the greatest happiness of man, is his being mortal.’ Speaks it not then, that even when Sophocles lived upon this earth, endurance was the lot of flesh? And the book of life, too, pronounces

nounces ‘man born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards.’ Can we, frail, fallible, as we are, expect to escape the general, the universal judgment? Oh, no, no! ‘Time has been,” and she breathed a shuddering sigh, “when like yon silver planet, now effaced, now emerging from drifting clouds, my cares were transitory: youth spread her blandishments; novelty her spells: sorrow came, and joy succeeded; for anxiety was as yon drifting clouds, and hope, as yon silver planet, beaming brighter and clearer through the shadows.”

“And hope be still as yon silver planet,” said Matilda, striving to reassure. “Cherish it, my poor friend; and quick, in the return of De Verdon, will it chase the vapour, and change despondence into joy.”

Margaret shook her head. Alas! that fiend to promise, blank despair, spell-bound her very faculties, and held her spirit tight in bondage.—“Suffering is  
the

the lot of earth," she again murmured. "Holy Heaven! gift me with resolution—gift me with submission to the end, that tracing thy hand in the chastening, I——" She ceased—she shrieked—for the loud blast of the horn, shriller in the deep stillness, rang through the building: again and again it sounded; and then a quick step in the passage—and then the door opened, and De Verdon and De Cantilupe entered the chamber. 'Margaret uttered a joyous cry; for spite of his muffling guise, she knew her lord, and sprung upon his neck. Wild and rapturous was the meeting: again was her fair face deluged in tears; but they were tears of thankfulness, tears of transport: all of bliss lay in the circle of his arms; and affliction, and endurance, and life's uncertainties, and life's vast catalogue of ills, were quick forgotten.

"We come to speed ye hence," said De Verdon, returning her caresses.

"The

“ The blow once struck, Heaven knows where the mischief may extend. Miser-like, I would secure my treasure;” and casting his arm around the tender Margaret, he again drew her fondly towards him.

“ Not to-night, my Theobald”—and she raised her eyes, beamy with love and blessedness—“ sure, not to-night: rest to-night, and journey with the first cock-crow.”

“ Almost with the first cock-crow would I reach Holmes Castle,” rejoined De Verdon. “ Ay, to-night, dearest, ere the moon traverse her path of clouds: we must move, my Margaret, as though guilt, not glory, covered us.”

“ But shall we never part again?” asked the delighted Margaret. “ Shall I always journey with you? shall I always be with you? Alack, my Theobald! you know not, how many sighs—how many tears, you have cost me.

Wellnigh

Wellnigh had I turned misanthrope, and quarrelled with all the world."

"I would kiss away thy tears—I would chase all thy sorrows," whispered the grateful husband. "Once in a safe abiding-place, duty will lose her terror."

Margaret looked wistfully in his face—"But shall we never part, love? Tell me—promise me—say we shall never part."

"Minion!" and De Verdon playfully stroked back the glossy curls contrasting her breast of snow—"why talk of parting, ere we have wellnigh met? God's truth! and we must all part hence on the instant, or my lord of Surrey will marvel at our tardiness."

"What, all? Say you, all, my lord?" questioned Matilda, wondering at the strange precipitance.

"Ay, lady, forthwith to Ryegate," replied the lord Theobald de Verdon. "At Holmes Castle, the earl of Surrey offers an abiding-place. But i' the name  
of

of thrift, man," addressing De Cantilupe, "thou art but a dumb emissary! Speed thee, and tell the fair Matilda, how thou art here, the representative of her uncle." Matilda looked up, and she blushed a die of crimson, for the lord George de Cantilupe, with folded arms, stood ardently perusing her features. "My uncle," she repeated—"I pray you, what of my uncle? Be brief, good, my lord, that I may haste to do his bidding."

De Cantilupe started; he tried to wrestle down the wild emotion, gendering in the warm love and tender greeting of the wedded Margaret; then, with a half sigh, and half averted glance—"Lady," he said, "your uncle, the brave Hugh, compelled to other service, intrusts to my care, the guardianship of your safety. With life"—and he placed his hand upon his heart—"will I fulfil the stewardship."

"Ergo," exclaimed De Verdon, laughing, "a true knight knows his duty:  
and,

and, on my soul, De Cantilupe is as right loyal a knight, as ever girded on sword, or wielded battleaxe!"

"I have not to learn the prowess and the magnanimity of the lord George de Cantilupe," timidly pronounced Matilda. "Alack! my own woe-fraught story, bears me ample record."

De Cantilupe's heart quickened; he uttered something of gratitude to Heaven—of the chosen agent in the work of rescue—of the rich recompence of her praise and her favour: but his voice was low, his words indistinct. His was the cowardice of love:—for such is the enigma of the mystic passion, that the warrior, heading armies, who moves as "a flame of death; whose spear never returned unstained with blood; nor his bow from the strife of the mighty"—trembles in the presence of timid woman!

Snatching the hasty refreshment, and hurrying the necessary preparation for departure, soon was Margaret and Matilda,

tilda, escorted by their true knights, and guarded by trust-worthy followers, on the road to Ryegate. What was it, that the track was heathy, wild, and desolate—that the cold wind whistled “melancholy music”—that the hoar-frost crackled beneath the horse-hoofs! Many a bland jest whiled away the hours; for Margaret was happy at the side of De Verdon; and De Verdon was replete with laughter-wooing anecdote. Sometimes he would talk, of the mighty phalanx, arming in the just cause; of the obstinate adhesion of king John to all his self-arrogated privileges: and then he would quick veer the theme to the sports of a camp, and tell of the vague wild exploits of his gay contemporaries—of the vicissitudes in his own fortune—of his scapes and perils in the armies of France: and Margaret would yield the smile and the tear; and Margaret would question, and like the gentle Desdemona,

“With



“ — With a greedy ear  
Devour up his discourse.”

Once he spoke of the earl de la Marche; and Matilda pressed to his side, anxious to catch some token of her father: but his was the mere circulations of busy rumour. It was the bandied report, how that the earl de la Marche, as chosen champion of the king of France, was coming forthwith into England, to settle, by single combat, a controversy, respecting a rich seigniory and certain castles, existing betwixt the two kings.

“ Perchance,” observed De Cantilupe, “king John may take up the gage himself.”

“ Not so, by my holidam !” rejoined De Verdon: “ ever does the injurer fear to meet the injured. God-wot ! and he would annihilate him at other hands; though scarce do I know the hand which can boast equal prowess with Hugh le Brun. Oft have I seen him——”

“ You—you have seen the earl de la Marche,”

Marche," interrupted Matilda—"you ——" and then she ceased and blushed, and marvelled at her own emotion.

"Ay, lady; and I have fought beneath the banner of the earl de la Marche," replied De Verdon, "and marked him, in the thickest of the fray, moving, like the firebrand of fate."

"Belike," said Margaret, "he wooed death, to cure love's crosses. Alack! what a mort of ill has the false Isabel in store!"

"Think you, my Margaret," questioned De Verdon, "such a woman could work the overthrow of such a mind? No, no, on my certes, the pride, rather than the heart of Le Brun, withered beneath the figt."

"True love," said Margaret, feelingly, "is not easy to dislodge."

"But hers was false love," quick returned De Verdon; "and false love, dear one, beareth its own antidote. Poor must be the spirit, which struggles not,  
which

“ Amen !” ejaculated De Verdon.

“ If the prayers of excellence and innocence can lighten the toil of life,” and De Cantilupe spoke with a joyous spirit, “ the earl de la Marche is blessed—the earl de la Marche must be blessed !”

To follow the intricacy of woods, and wilds, and sterile heaths, then dotting the now fertile face of England, and over which our travellers speeded to their destined bourn ; to tarry with them in the chantries and hospitals, forming the sole resting-places to man and beast, would be to exceed the limit, without adding to the interest of our pages :—hasten we then to state, that whilst night yet trembled on the verge of morning, a goodly cavalcade of knights, with their esquires, pages, and sumpter-horses, seemingly steering the road they had journeyed, passed at a steady trot ; and that De Verdon and his companions, forthwith toiling the steep ascent, though chilled with the keen and nipping air of  
a clear

a clear December morning, paused on the summit of Ryegate hill. Forgetful of the perils, which man, fitful man, thick scatters in this pass to eternity; of the turmoils and strifes, threatening desolation, where now smiled nought save peace, Matilda, with lips breathing praise, and a heart attuned to early homage, gazed on the prospect before her.

The newly risen sun, chasing the dense vapours of night, shone upon Holmesdale, and burnished earth and sky in one broad blaze of radiance. On the south side, amid embowering trees, thick mantled in hoar-frost, and sparkling like gems in the sunbeams, dedicated to the worship and glory of God, stood the little monastery of Sanctæ Crucis, built by William de Warren first earl of Surrey, and tenanted by the brothers of St. Augustine. To the east, perched upon a shelving ridge, as though the giant guardian of the vale, was Holmes Castle, frowning in embattled strength, and

offering to the wayfarers, an asylum, and a resting-place.

“Pity,” said Margaret, gazing on the green pastures and meandering streams, hushed and stilled by the numbing influence of winter, “that yon valley, fashioned for harmony and for holiness, should e’er be visited by the plagues and pestilence of war. Alas! my Theobald, how strangely opposite be the passions influencing the tenants of yon opposite buildings! the one, harbouring the zeal of holiness; the other, yielding to the mad intemperance of party-hate. And yet”—and deep thought sat like a cloud on her brow—“a little season, forsooth! and all shall be forgotten; a few brief years, and with the tenants, all shall have passed away.”

“God’s truth! love,” exclaimed De Verdon, “thou art too pretty to preach such dull aphorisms, else, will thy hearers turn converts, and forswear the joys of the world. Rather be thine the theme  
of

of hope and pleasure, for love is sweetest decked in smiles. But more of love anon, my Margaret: speed we now to the kindling hearth, for the frost has nipped thy roses."

Passing o'er the drawbridge, and dismounting in the court-yard of Holmes Castle, brief was the ceremony of introduction. The carl of Surrey himself led to the hall, for courteous hospitality tokened the greeting. The board was spread with the morning meal: amber-ale sparkled in the goblets; and manchetts, and pasties, and viands of tempting savour, courted to the feast.

"Anon must we play the hypocrite, and journey to the court," said the carl, addressing De Verdon. "'Tis fitting we wear a mask, until the season for adventure ripen."

"To the court," repeated De Verdon.

"Ay, rumour has but forestalled the fact," quick rejoined Surrey. "England and France, for the long contested  
G 2                      seigniories,

seigniories, submit alike their claims to the prowess of their chosen champions."

"Belike rumour still bandies her lies and her fables," observed De Cantilupe.

"Not so, my lord; 'tis gospel fact," resumed the earl. "Ere yet one gleam of day twinkled in the east, the proclaimed champion of France, Hugh le Brun, earl de la Marche, parted hence."

"Sure as death," and the energetic Margaret snatched at the arm of her husband, "'twas this Hugh le Brun, this redoubtable earl de la Marche, who passed us at daybreak!"

Matilda spoke not, but the quick variations of her cheek, declared her interest painfully excited. What was it, that torturing doubts arose in the breast of De Cantilupe—that he watched her with wary caution! She saw him not—her eyes rested on the earl of Surrey—her thoughts on the earl de la Marche. The mysterious palmer had once said:  
"I move with the vassals of Hugh le  
Brun,

Brun, earl de la Marehe." Was it marvel then, that her heart throbbed with the wildest emotion ?

" Lady," said the earl, addressing Margaret, " the coal-blaek armour, and sable plume of the earl de la Marche, marked him from his followers."

" Night, my lord, clothed all alike in sable," answered Margaret. " But for the tramp of horse-hoofs, we had passed as two scudding clouds."

" The earl de la Marche," continued Surrey, " wears the outward token of inward grief. On my troth, he is but the shadow of the earl de la Marche I once knew ! But though worn down by some heavy and festering ill, at the mention of his embassy to the court at Westminster, his spirit, like heaven's lightning, glared through the thunder of his frown."

" And the champion of England," questioned De Verdon : " knowest thou, my lord, who will measure lance with Le Brun ?"



" 'Tis at the option of king John," returned Surrey. " La Marche guesses not his adversary."

" Marry ! but his adversary must be a bold man," remarked De Verdon. " I wage Le Brun against a host."

" I would it were Savary de Mauleon !" exclaimed Margaret. " On my life, I would dare the presence of king John to see the issue !"

" Nay, lady," said the earl of Surrey, " whether it be De Mauleon or other, the lady of the lord Theobald de Verdon must vouchsafe her presence. 'Tis policy that we lay perdue till we strike, and that very policy must speak in ready acquiescence to the coming summons."

" But the king kens nought of the lord Theobald de Verdon's little wife," quick replied Margaret, glancing at her husband : " sure then I may be spared taking part in the drama."

" In such a gay parterre, boasting all of beauty and of noble bearing," gallantly observed

observed the earl, "ill could be spared two peerless rose-buds!" And as he spoke, he bowed alike to Margaret and Matilda.

"Wherever my duty call me," murmured the blushing Margaret; and Matilda bowed her head in silent token of acknowledgment.

De Cantilupe was at her side.—"Lady," he whispered, "I would be thy own true knight, and measure lance with Savary de Mauleon. Smile on my efforts, and dearly shall the recreant pay for his presumption."

"Not so," said Matilda, fearfully: "rather, my lord, would I shrink away into obscurity, than dare the publicity of such a rencontre. No, no; the shade is best fitting to my fortune."

"Say not so," urged De Cantilupe. "Be thy fortune cloudless as thy virtues! Give me the right of championship; bless me with the coveted award of preference; and in sight of the whole

world, will I maintain the dear distinction. 'This glove, lovely Matilda !' and as he spoke, he caught her hand, and strove to steal the prize : but Matilda, astounded by a new and sudden light, firmly withheld it : a universal trembling seized her ; her check grew pale, and sadness was in her eye ; yet she arose, and without word or look, moved close to the side of Margaret.

## CHAPTER VI.

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" Now, on my soul, thy story is so wild,
So sad, so wondrous strange, so full of woe ;
That quick by turns, cursings and blessings rise,
And tears crown all."

THE arrival of Hugh at Holmes Castle, shed further light on the already-announced tournament. It was to be held in Smithfield, and divers heralds, far and wide,

wide, had made proclamation of the same. King John was to take up his abode, and to entertain all persons of distinction, in the palace of the lord bishop of London; for princes and nobles, from the principal courts of Europe, were summoned to the tilt; and balls and maskings, and festivities and rejoicings, awaited the gay pageant. Nought of mourning was to be seen in a land of mourning; misery was to hide her head; oppression was to smile in her chains:—and policy can smile, and policy can assume the guise to aid her purpose; for in secret council, it was adjudged fitting, for the chief engines in the mischief-plot to wear the outward seeming of fealty;—for the barons, bound in the great confederacy, and leagued unto death, to submit to the self-violence of external homage, content, till after the turn of Christmas—the season appointed by the holy Langton, for the firm and formal demand of their liber-

ties, at the hand of the king—to wear the mask, and to assemble at the court, in the full blaze of their strength and bearings.

“Even I,” said Hugh, watching and wondering at the fearful repugnance of Matilda, “will speed to London, and behold the prowess of Le Brun.”

“Thou—thou, my uncle,” faltered Matilda.

“Ay, and thou also, my pretty niece,” quick rejoined Hugh. “God’s truth! we will together view the strife; and should the lord de Mauleon dare the list, unknown, unnamed, attainted as I am, I will hurl the gage, and call him recreant to his very teeth.”

“Not for worlds! not for worlds!” cried Matilda. “Dearest sir, dearest uncle; if discovered—if known! Alas!” and tears sprung to her eyes, “if I should lose thee.”

“Well, girl, should it prove so, still mayest thou boast a younger champion :
one

one who will shew thee to the world in a light to daunt the libertine ardour of all gay galliards. List to me, Matilda; for I would fain tell thee, that for thyself alone, portionless, nameless as thou seemest, there is one, rich, and noble, and replete with all of this world's good, who would woo thee, and win thee, for his bride: for thyself, dearest; mark that, for thyself alone. Well mayest the full damask chase the maiden-rose from thy cheek; well mayest thou glow in exultation and transport! Yet art thou too pretty to be seen and not sought; too gentle to be known and not loved. If thy father were here, Matilda, he would give thee, as I give thee, to the love and honour of——” He ceased, but she spoke not; he gazed intently in her face, and he saw that full damask fade to snow; he saw her lips as tintless as her kerchief.

“Why this emotion?” he demanded —“why this misgiving of heart? Sure

it must be joy;" and again he ceased, but still was Matilda statue-like and silent. "Body o'me!" quick resumed Hugh, "I have oft heard say woman is a riddle; and by the mass, I cannot even spell her! Why, girl—why, niece, must I say the lord George de Cantilupe loves thee? and God be praised, thy manner has cast no ice upon his passion!"

Matilda raised her hand, as though to press down the throbbings of her bosom; she seemed to wrestle with inward emotion—she panted for breath—she looked as one summoned to the stake, not to the altar.—"The lord George de Cantilupe," she at length faltered. "Alas! sir, how wofully have we misconstrued each other! As my rescuer in the hour of need—as the loved brother of my friend, the lady Millicent, my gratitude, my esteem—no further—oh, no, no! no further"—and she buried her face in her hands.

"And why not further?" urged Hugh.

Hugh. "Tell me a richer mind?—tell me a more seemly person?"

Matilda thought of him to whom her virgin faith was plighted, and a smile and a glow lived in the thought.

"Belike," pursued Hugh, vainly awaiting her answer, "'tis one of thy sex's privileges, to toy and trifle with the heart which loves ye. By the blood of the martyrs! if it were I, unless passion made me fool, I would turn it to thy own hindrance. Marry, girl! take counsel—take to thyself a husband, and leave all of banter to the fitting season. What still silent—still so coy, so very coy. God's truth! then will I call De Cantilupe to his own wooing, for I like not the embassy;" and as he spoke, he moved towards the door, but Matilda cast herself before it.—"Spare me—spare me, the pang, the conflict. Dear sir—dearest uncle, 'tis no subtilty, 'tis no weak vain coying. I cannot—I must not—I dare not hear him."

"How,

“How, dare not,” repeated Hugh. “Here is some strange mystery. Explain?” and his look was appalling.

“I would shrink away into obscurity,” sobbed Matilda, cowering beneath that scathing glance—“I would bury myself in some close retreat—I would live as best befits my fortune. I—I——” Her breath was laboured; her very pulses felt to stop; she cast herself on her knees before him—“I am not what I seem,” she gasped out. “Oh, spare me!” Then smothering down an hysterical sob—“Go, sir; say to the lord George de Cantilupe, all that gratitude, all that friendship warrants: but nought beyond—nought beyond, on your soul’s immortal quiet!”

Hugh snatched at her hand; he raised her from the ground; he held her at arms length; he viewed her steadfastly, sternly: then, after a pause, deep and deadly, such as rides upon the thunder-clap—“Be brief; thy story,” he demanded. “Yet cast but a slur upon the glory
of

of thy heritage, and by the blessed Jesu, dreadful shall be the recognisance !”

Again Matilda lay at his feet—again she gasped for air: she felt as though the death-pang was on her; her hands, her face, were cold and pale as marble, and heavy did she wrestle with the convulsive throes within.

“God-wot! I am no tyrant,” pursued Hugh—“I would be as thy father—I would not scare, I would reassure. Answer me, Matilda”—and he strove to look a quiescence he could not feel—“say what militates against thy love for De Cantilupe?”

“I love another,” timidly pronounced Matilda.

“Name him, girl?”

“Alas! I cannot.”

“Cannot,” echoed Hugh. “Meanest thou, he has no name, no birth, no boast beyond a goodly person? Perchance,” and he spoke with irony, “he laboured out the largess of broken victuals in the
convent

convent garden ; or, forsooth, some boor in the nigh hamlet."

" And sweet had been the bread of honest toil," exclaimed Matilda, rallying into momentary courage. " My dear father found it so, although oft 'twas steeped in the tears of wounded feeling."

" I would not wound thee, girl : but more of this hidden love—this blain upon thy fortune ?"

Again did Matilda's lovely face, like a lily in the storm, bend upon her bosom : hers was the bashfulness of woman ; that inherent bashfulness, shrinking from the inquisition of such a theme.

" Answer me, girl. Tell me by what vow thou art bound to this nameless hero ?"

" By the vow of faith, of love, of duty, unto death," murmured Matilda.

" God forefend us !" ejaculated the indignant Hugh, " say, rather, by the vow of enthusiasm and passion."

" By the vow of the church ;" and Matilda

tilda raised her eye as she spoke, and glanced at her uncle.

His start was palsied—his lip quivered—his cheek waxed as wan as her own: he shuddered back, then with a desperate effort—"Married?" he demanded.

"Ay, sure as yon Heaven be just and merciful," replied Matilda.

"With or without the sanction of a father's blessing?" quick interrogated Hugh.

"Away from my father—away from all save the pleadings of my own heart—Alas! alas! frown not so deadly. List to me, uncle, dear uncle, and I will tell thee all."

"Of his name—~~of~~ his name alone," thundered the enraged Hugh. "Wretched, lost, degenerate girl! what if I tell thee, ~~thou~~ hast cast slur on the archives of a noble house."

"Not so," exclaimed Matilda. "On my life, the man with whom I plighted faith, is as right noble as thyself! Nay,
list

list to me, uncle: if necessity shed cloud on the born dignity of my father, is it marvel, the like cloud should gather o'er the fortunes of my husband?"

"His name—first of his name," urged Hugh. "Answer, if thou wouldst not hear me curse him."

"I know him brave, and just, and generous; but alas!" faltered Matilda, "I know not his name."

"What wedded, and thy husband nameless: now, by the immortal powers, thou art duped—duped by a villain! No record—no single testament of plighted faith."

Matilda burst into a passion of tears: mystery and misfortune pressed as a mildew on her spirits—"The priest, the record, the witnesses," she sobbed—"all—all perished in the cell of the sisters of St. Claire. But Heaven's high will be done!" and she raised her dewy eyes in meek submission; and she crossed her hands upon her bosom—

“Soft as dove’s-down, and as white as it,
Or Ethiopian’s tooth, or the fann’d snow,
That’s bolted by the northern blast twice o’er.”

“Tell me all of this strange story?” said Hugh. “’Tis fitting I glean aught of matter to furnish clue to the labyrinth.”

And as she succinctly recited her parting with her father—her visit to the convent chapel—her first meeting with the palmer, his interest **gradually** augmented, and soon was it **riveted** in painful earnestness. Sometimes he would start fitfully; then, as though wrestling down the war within, would he strike his forehead, and stay her for the instant, and yield to moody **abstraction**—“Little—little did I dream,” he exclaimed, gnashing his teeth, and wildly clenching his hands, “when **chance** leagued me to those **accursed pilgrims**, that I was heaping coals of fire **upon** the solitary hope of my own house.”

“Say not accursed,” implored Matilda.

tilda. "Dearest uncle, at the dispensation of Heaven, why should we repine?"

"Say, rather, the dispensation of hell," muttered Hugh; "for sure Heaven could have no hand in the dark trammel. But be brief, girl: I would learn all, lest I saddle the wrong back with the burden."

Again Matilda strove to speak; yet did she tremble; and when she noted the night visit of the palmer, she glanced timidly at her uncle. Sudden light felt to flash upon his senses.

"Mighty God!" he ejaculated; "the stranger with whom I journeyed; the stranger with whom I chanced join fellowship: who won me by his urbanity; who stole upon me in the moment of unguarded feeling—and all of earth are subject to such moments—when newly I had found a father, had clasped a brother, as though from the grave! Ay, ay, I see it all. Though unknown, and shrouded in his pilgrim guise—fool, fool, that I was, I told him of the strange discovery—

discovery—I speeded him to rouse my brother from his drone-like calling, to bid him to the camp at Loches; whilst I, doubtful of my own firmness, and dreading, through impulsive feeling, to drag down ruin on both our heads, fled coward-like away.”

Matilda crept close beside him, her heart palpitating, her cheeks glowing; yet did she raise her eyes to his face, as timidly she said—“ You fled to Loches—you joined the camp at Loches—tell me then, dear uncle, when in the camp at Loches, saw you aught further of the palmer?”

“ Never, from the hour we parted on the banks of the Gartampe,” replied Hugh, “ have I seen aught—have I heard aught of the palmer.”

Matilda shuddered back; she could not speak, for cold grief lay heavy at her heart.

“ ’Tis I to question of this veiled hero,” pursued Hugh, after an anguished pause;

pause; " 'tis fitting that I question. Go on, then; go on, I adjure thee:—whether of earth or heaven"—and he spoke with solemn fervour—"think 'tis thy father questions, and tell me thy very thoughts?"

"My thoughts," murmured Matilda: "ah, sure, my thoughts were replete with gratitude! How could I feel other than gratitude for such service!"

"Well, **well**," impatiently, "call it service, if **thou** listeth: but be brief: explain to **me**, the price required for this mighty service?"

"The price, my uncle," repeated the innocent Matilda—"what **price**? Sure, thou dost but **banter**."

"**Banter**!" **echoed** Hugh: "now, by the holy cross! **banter** is as foreign to my feelings, as **interested service** at the hands of **this unknown palmer**. Answer me, Matilda—and he spoke with bitterness—"what recompence did **this unknown palmer** crave of the humble
ble

ble daughter of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux?"

"He spoke not of recompence—he dreamt not of recompence. Dear sir, his own brave heart yielded ample recompence in the deed of grace."

"Tush! tush, girl! thou art a novice, and thy very sensibility has been the trap to snare thee. Say, did he not wound thee with the viper-sting of passion?—did he not dissipate thy peace?—and in the lieu of calmness and content, fill thy brain with vain hopes and wild wishes? Say, did he not tell thee, his heart was all flame, his mind all transport?—did he not lure thee from folly to folly? Say—say"—and he placed his hand on hers; and his hand was cold and damp, and tremulous with contending feelings.

"Alas! thou art ~~an~~ ^{my} sir," said Matilda.

"Go on—go on, though I were dying, yet would I expound this riddle."

Again Matilda reverted to the interview

view so dear to memory : she dwelt on the very words of the stranger : and when she spoke of the signet-ring, the thoughts and the speculations of Hugh again became confused. That signet-ring, worn but by the chiefs of the combining forces, tokened of birth and power ; and vague and wild surmises crowded on each other. Bitterly did he execrate the treachery of the lord Savary de Mauleon ; and when within the ruined tower, he forgot all his past suspicions, in blessing the hand which snatched her from the peril.

“ Now, God forgive me,” he ejaculated, “ for having wronged that man ! On my troth, is he right noble, and mine the shame of bad thoughts.” And then again he lent a ready ear ; and when sojourning in the camp, and when removed to the little cell of the sisters of St. Claire, his interest grew wellnigh to torture.

Matilda wept as she closed the sad recital ;

recital; and plunged into deep thought, for many moments, Hugh remained, with his arms folded, and his eyes bent on the ground. Suddenly starting, and dashing away a tear—"What parted at the altar," he exclaimed—"parted, with the vow scarce uttered! Sure is he a man gifted above his fellows; for, by the rood, had the enemy knocked at the very gate, I had not forsaken my bride! God grant thou mayest meet again, Matilda; meet in sunshine and in bliss! for though to De Cantilupe it be but sorry hearing, perish the man, who would erect his triumph on the fall of such a rival! And now, dear one, take comfort: look up and smile, and woo back the roses on that cheek"—and tenderly he stroked aside her dark hair, and patted that faded cheek—"the secret is told—the uncle appeared—the would-be lover wellnigh rejected. Ay, take comfort, my girl, and bosom new hope; for if the bridegroom be of earth—earth shall

not hide him from our search. Said he not, he moved with the vassals of the earl de la Marche?"

"Ay, truly, did he," sighed Matilda.

"Then, on my life," quick rejoined Hugh, "will we speed to London; and at the close of the coming tournament, should blind chance fail to befriend us, will we crave him at the hands of Le Brun himself."

But though Matilda lived in the heart and in the sunshine of her uncle's favour; though the lord George de Cantilupe, rallying into exertion, bore away the festering pang of blighted love far from Holmes Castle; though soothed by the assiduity of the gentle Margaret, and surrounded by friends, and hemmed in by protectors—her heart was perturbed, and her mind restless; for fear would still surmount hope, and anxiety would still chase away cheerfulness. Well did she know that policy alone stayed the ripening zeal of the combining nobles;
and

and though identifying the recovery of her father in the approaching effect of their unanimity and courage, often, whilst the busy agents in the huge plot held secret council in the arched vault beneath the castle, wasting the midnight oil in deep debate, would she watch and weep, and tremble, at the melancholy moanings of the night-blast, and wish that the glorious aim were well accomplished.

Time, speeding to the annihilation of all things earthly—from the deep and sleepless council, needing all of nerve and skill, and despising, in the gigantic aim of liberty to England, the

“ ————Thefts and rapes,
Sack’d towns, and midnight howlings,

which must mark the struggle—the earls and barons, quick rallying into active preparation, awaited unmoved the approaching day, claiming the last act of unqualified submission :—for the marshal

of the jousting match had dispersed his heralds, and each bold chief was summoned to the court, in due and especial order.

"Although I can bear no device on my shield, or crest on my helm—although, as when in the assembly at St. Edmund's-bury, I must move as an unknown solitary man," observed Hugh, seeking the side of Matilda, and recounting to her the rivalry in splendour, speaking in the busy preparation of the nobles—"still will we join this gay pageant, and witness, betwixt England and France, the pending stress for mastery."

"I fear it will try thy spirits, and overwhelm the stand of thy philosophy," said Matilda.

Hugh forced a sickly smile.—"Trust me, I shall breast the storm, and pen up the breakers," he rejoined. "'Tis true, if wishes were scorpions, I would hurl them at the heart of the tyrant John: but alack! wishes can neither aid friend

nor

nor harm foe : at best, are they as the air-bubble, inflated and empty. But for John"—and the frown on his brow lowered—"I might move at the head of thousands—I might bear into the field, a shield, emblazoning the glories of an unblenched ancestry—I might aid, with sinews of iron, the cause I father. But for John, thou, too, my niece, might vie with the proudest dames of Britain—Say, then, have I not cause to curse him?" He paused, then moving close beside her, and bending almost to her ear—"Canst thou be secret?" he demanded—"canst thou lock up thy lips, and hold the key in thy own keeping? Yet, no, no," drawing fearfully back, "a wife can know no secret. This nameless husband, forsooth! God-wot! he may return—he may worm out the dangerous trust. No—no—in silence is safety! Not that I would impeach his honour, my poor girl," reading sadness in her eye, and striving at atonement, "but 'tis fit-

ting we find this husband first: and if he prove a true knight"—and he spoke with proud exultation—"we will whisper in his ear, that—as the flower in the desert, as the diamond in the mine—the portionless child of the unknown gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, is meet for a princely diadem!"

CHAPTER VII.

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"When the ebb runs lowest, the reflux comes,  
And Fortune pours, perchance, to deal us grace,  
The influx of her favour!

Certain it be, this changing, shifting world,  
Made up of motley stripes and subtle shreds,  
Is dotted thick with good and ill;—the good,  
To soothe—the ill, to prove our patience."

So wrapped in shade are all the minutias  
of that distant period—so completely has  
Time cast his oblivious mantle over the  
then existing state of things—that to  
transform

transform the now contracted square, penned in with buildings, and held as the cattle mart of our metropolis, into the grand area, set apart for contests of strength and dexterity, needeth the fabled wand of some kind genii, rather than a pen, crippled and confined, for lack of extant record. Fancy then must befriend our purpose; fancy must “glow with the light of other days”—must close in the lists—must erect the thrones and the balconies—must spread the tissue of gold, and wave the awning of crimson—must furnish order in the pompous pageant, and conjure the “nerve of fire and the heart of flame.” Simply noting then, the train of threescore coursers, caparisoned for the joust, each mounted by an esquire of honour; threescore ladies, borne on ambling palfreys, and each lady, in a silver chain, leading her captive knight; track we the gorgeous cavalcade, from the Tower of London, along Cheapside, direct into Smithfield:

then noting the royal Isabel, the lady of the tournament, sparkling in costly gems, and seated on her throne of honour, herself, beauteous, as the creature of another world—without once lingering, to paint the thoughts or the feelings of Matilda, when accompanied by the lady Margaret de Verdon, and escorted by her uncle, by the earl of Surrey, by the lord Theobald de Verdon, she found herself once more at the side of the lady Millicent de Cantilupe, and read the soft language of her eye, and felt the pressure of her hand, and heard the murmured gratulations of her lips—haste we to the moment, when, preceded by the loud blast of the trumpets, Hugh le Brun, earl de la Marche, the chosen champion of France, was announced by the heralds.

Every eye turned in mute expectancy ; every heart throbbed with complicated feeling : king John smiled in exultation—Isabel blushed a deeper colouring—Matilda, scarce conscious of the movement,

ment, bent o'er the balcony, forgetful of surrounding thousands. Him she had so often heard of—him she had so often thought of with commiseration and with sorrow: the hero who had ever fought to conquer—the man who had ever moved the admiration of a multitude!

Mounted on a sleek-black Arabian, with black trappings, himself eased in a suit of black armour, and a plume of the like sable die nodding o'er his helm, the earl de la Marche slowly rode into the arena. His vizor was closed, and he moved as one regardless of the notice he elicited; yet he approached the royal balcony, and gracefully performing the accustomed reverence, turned, to woo his antagonist, and to await the signal of the course. The trumpets again blew a shrill and prolonged blast, and that antagonist, clad in burnished steel, crested with a snow-white plume, and bestriding an iron-grey charger, galloped into the lists. But when the herald,

on the part of England, pronounced him, Walter de Lacey, earl of Meath, Matilda felt the palsied start of her uncle—felt the tight grasp of his hand, as, half raising himself, he bent forward. Yet he spoke not—he breathed no sound: and the next instant, all of interest was turned on the combatants; for, with terrific force, they rushed upon each other, and quick were their lances shivered. Another and another course succeeded, and desperate waged the strife; blow arising out of blow; skill emulating skill: now England, now France, promising the mastery; now furious and eager, closing and parting, and struggling for the palm. Alike dismounting, and craving fresh weapons of their attendant pages, the mimic warfare grew into hotter broil; the toil and vigour of the fight redoubled: a sudden stroke at the hand of Le Brun severed the thongs which bound the casque of De Lacey; and scorning the seeming vantage, and quick

quick loosening the rivets of his own helmet, the like instant despoiled them of their head-gear.

That instant arrested the impending blow—that instant roused their feelings even from the contested supremacy of their rival countries—that instant turned every eye on the shrieking, struggling Matilda!—It was her father!—it was her husband! and the discovery was wellnigh mortal. She sprung up—she strove to cast herself from the balcony: her face was death-wan—her features convulsed: again and again her shrieks rung round the area, as wildly she stretched forth her arms towards them. Doubtless it was the bitterest trial in her short life: the two she had mourned so faithfully—the two she prized so dearly, armed against each other, striving for very life: and not till she knew them at her side—for it needed not the marshal of the jousting match to stay the combat—did her cries and

her struggles yield to happy insensibility. Borne from the gaze of thousands, when she revived, she revived to blessedness; for her head was pillowed on the bosom of Le Brun, and De Lacey, grateful, and wondering, was bending over her. Millicent, too, and Margaret, and all whom her heart loved, were crowding around her! it was no dream—it was no cozening of the fancy: in the moment of excited feeling, king John had pronounced the pardon of her father—the pardon of her uncle; and the earls of Meath and Ulster, might now emerge in open day, might now break forth from their muffling shade!

Quick, as in this more enlightened age, did the miraculous story travel; did it pass from lip to lip, and gather with every tongue: yet the amusement of the hour, stayed, was not defeated; and though individual feeling and private interest warred against all further stress betwixt the champions of England

land and France, soon was order restored, and many brave candidates, emulous for the honour of knighthood, pressed into the lists. It was a gay pageant, and the smile of beauty, and the meed of favour, spurred on to enterprise: but leave we the valiant combatants, reaping, at the hand of majesty, the coveted honours—leave we the pages, rivetting the golden spur—leave we the minstrels, chanting loud strains of animating chivalry—leave we the splendid feast, the gay ball, closing on the exertions of the day, to seek again, the purer, happier presence of Matilda; to join her in the dwelling of the baron De Cantilupe, the dwelling, from which, at the treacherous instigation of the lord Savary de Mauleon, she had so witlessly wandered. Yet when within the presence of Matilda, how can we raise the veil?—how portray the inward workings of the soul?—how frame words, to express half the mighty rush of gratitude and transport? Restored to her father—



father—restored to her husband : alternately clasped to the bosom of each, and bathed in the sweetest, richest tears of joy and bliss ! 'True happiness admits of little delineation : true happiness is felt, rather than expressed : 'tis grief which swells whole pages ; 'tis adversity which furnishes matter for volumes ! Yet in this state of incertitude and trial, true happiness—however it be zealously pursued, by all, and in every class of men ; however it be as the meteor-flame, brightening in distance, and buoying amid the rough rude surges of the world ; however it be overtaken, clenched, and tightly grasped at—is far too subtle to retain : basking in its broad and cloudless sunshine, life would cease to be trial ! shut away from its faint and flickering scintillations, life would be all barrenness !

The stern duty, voluntarily imposed, awakened from the bewildered trance of bliss : the hour fast approached, when  
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the mask of policy was to be withheld ; when the patriot nobles were to stand forth the champions and redressers of their country's grievances ; when the grant of ancient privileges was to be claimed at the hands of king John, and peace, or civil war, to dawn, the blessing or the scourge of England. Alas ! in the known obstinacy and sullen perverseness of king John, no spring of peace promised : thick and murky clouds gathered in the future ; for right was to be extorted, and justice to become the source of contention and of blood. Love, in the heart of Le Brun, and parental affection in that of De Lacey, mingled doubts and fears in the wildest flights of their enthusiasm : they trembled for a being dearer than peace or health ; for her, who in the season of adversity, had shed sunshine on their loneliness ; for her, who had been as the honeyed drop in their cup of bitters : and not until Matilda, together with the lady Margaret de

de Verdon, were safe removed to Holmes Castle, could they regain that cool and tempered possession, so necessary in the threat of peril.

“Dearest treasure of my life,” faltered Le Brun, chasing the fast falling tears from the fair cheek of his bride, “smiles, not tears, befit our blissful union ! Think—think of return, not of separation.”

“Alas !” sighed Matilda, and she shuddered at the remembrance, “the last separation scares all my courage.”

“Yet, blessed be God, we have met again !” quick resumed Le Brun—“met, when hope was wellnigh lost. Think, my Matilda, when escaping from prison and from sufferance, I sought again the holy spot in which all of expectation and of joy was centred;—think, when my eyes encountered the fatal wreck—when I beheld the black, black ruin. Mighty Heaven !” and he trembled as he spoke, “death had been bliss, compared to the pang of that moment. It  
was

was a pang, too pungent, to last and live; a pang, proclaiming the daughter of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, dear, as the vital fount of my being; a pang——”

“Forget it,” implored Matilda, stretching forth her hand, and smiling in grateful acknowledgment, and striving to lure him from that remembered pang.—“Ah!” and tears of transport gemmed her eyes—“when, at Heringworth, I heard of the capture of the earl de la Marche, how little did I dream him my own mysterious palmer! But I would fain hear all, my dear lord, even from the moment of our parting.”

“Ay, my Matilda, and you shall hear from the moment of our first meeting, too,” rejoined Le Brun; “and prior to our first meeting; for with the necessity, perish all of concealment.” For many moments he mused, as though diving amid the events of years gone by: then, with a smile, tender and confiding—

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"The unchequered calm of my youth," he observed, "boasts nought beyond the routine of study and recreation. I was gay, and thoughtless, and happy; for I fancied the world made for my pleasure, and that all who told me so, loved me, and that all who smiled upon me were my friends. Prosperity spoilt me, and tempered me but ill to the rubs of after life. My father died, and together with his title and rich seigniory, I inherited the will to fulfil his wishes. Almost from the cradle I had been affianced to the infant daughter of Aymer earl of Angoulesme. To the misjudging eye, Isabel was perfect in mind as in form: she was young and playful, and fitly fashioned to cozen a heart more experienced than my own. She—she——"

"I have seen the queen of England," interrupted Matilda; "and nought of earth, sure, can be so lovely!"

"The casket—I grant you, the casket," quick returned Le Brun: "for the  
the

the mind, for the heart of Isabel, it is cold, calculating, ambitious."

"Not so—say not so, my lord," exclaimed Matilda. "The mind, the heart of Isabel, is great, and capable of generous deeds; the mind, the heart of Isabel——"

"How guess you, that perfect mind, that perfect heart?" interrogated the earl. "Isabel"—and he looked proudly, disdainfully, as he spoke—"beguiled me with treacherous smiles and shallow promises: she vowed to love me, until she beheld king John; and then her senses were dazzled with the blaze of royalty, and she forgot her vows, she forswore all her promises. Yet may Heaven's blessing light upon her; for in you, my Matilda"—and tenderly he folded her to his bosom—"has she bestowed upon me, a being, as lovely as herself, with a mind, with a heart, befitting the rare image!"

"May Heaven's blessing light upon her!"

her!" emphatically pronounced Matilda, raising her face, beamy with joy and bliss, from the shoulder of her husband. "But for the royal Isabel, chains, and a dungeon, had been the merciless award of king John." And briefly she narrated all that she had learned respecting the queen's concurrence in his escape from Corfe Castle.

"Strange," exclaimed Le Brun; "human nature is all made up of inconsistency! Yes, together we will bless her, my Matilda, for amply has she compensated the past: she has dappled my path with sunshine—she has given me felicity—she has enriched me with a heart beyond all price!" And again his arm encircled her waist, and again did that faithful, tender heart, throb gratitude and joy. "Doubtless, it was pride, and mortified vanity, and outraged feeling," pursued the earl, "which goaded so fiercely, when first the language of her eye proclaimed the perversion of her duty.

duty. It was a period of madness, and rage, and jealousy, and fancied despair. I found coldness where late I had met smiles—I deciphered reluctance in the lieu of gentleness and quiescence: and when her father unfolded the foul truth, was it marvel, that I cursed her—that I cursed the whole world; that I fancied all men base, and all women treacherous? The rankling, feverish fire of revenge, alone roused me from hermit-like solitude. I started into action—I grafted my own festering wrongs, on the keener, deeper wrongs of the house of Britany—I wedded myself to vengeance: and when, on the self-awarded embassy of conscience, I withdrew myself from the camp, and close veiling my rank and station, exchanged the rough habit of a soldier for the zealous covering of faith; it was to purchase the prayers of the church—to burn frankincense and myrrh on the altar of the holy of holies—to pour out the misered griefs of my own  
galled



galled and wounded spirit—and to pray, at the hands of Mark Fitz-Acory, abbot of St. Mary's, that absolving balm, which piety and meekness knows how well to yield. Methinks, your eyes, other than your lips, my Matilda, shape further query: sure then, 'twas Providence, which identifies in one, the confessor of the late earl my father and the abbot of the white monks of Cisteaux—Providence, mercifully working out blessings in store—Providence, pouring forth the abundant harvest in the very season of bitterest discontent! for, but for my knowledge and appreciation of the good and pious Fitz-Acory, my prayers and my gifts had been offered at another shrine. Need I call to mind, the bright still moonshine, which drove you, all pale, and scared, and trembling, to claim protection at a stranger hand; which rousing me from the dream of other worlds, fixed me—rivetted me to this? Heretofore, my moody jaundiced fancy,

fancy, had stigmatized your whole sex, with art, and blandishment, and chicanery:—it was for you alone, my love, beauteous and innocent as your sister spirits of the sky, to melt away the ice-casing of my heart, and harmonize my feelings. Yes, my Matilda—with transport I confess it—I bore with me into action, that dear and timid image; that rosy bashfulness, so witching and so rare:—even had I guessed you none other than the daughter of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, you had been prized—you had been cherished—you had lived *as a sunbeam on my fancy!*”

Those words, those magic words, laden with a thousand fond remembrances, called beamy blushes to the cheeks of Matilda: sweet was the smile which met the rapturous gaze of her lord; touching the accent which breathed of first impression: it was the confidence of wedded faith; it was that undisguised,  
that

that bliss-fraught latitude, which love, and purest love, alone can guess at!

“Marvel not,” resumed Le Brun, “that the hour which rescued you from the unknightly custody of the base De Mauleon, gendered betwixt us a mortal feud. Divorcing himself from the cause he advocated, quick was he leagued to our enemy John; and setting at nought all the bonds of honour and sworn fellowship, he moved a stinging scourge to the side he had so late espoused. Yes, my Matilda, it was De Mauleon who tangled me in the toil of treachery; who, wellnigh from the altar, taught me the contrast of a prisoner’s doom: for scarce had I lost sight of the holy pile which contained my treasure—scarce had the rich burnish of rapturous exultation faded from my cheek—scarce had the vow died upon my lips, when, hemmed in, and recognised, I was seized, and plunged into all the horrors of spirit-killing incertitude. Could a glance  
have

have borne annihilation, De Mauleon had paid the forfeit of his treason. I saw him, amid the foes of my country, bold in authority, and high in trust—I saw him, the renegade to his calling, the busy fiend, who had delyed the mine beneath my feet—I knew him triumphant in the full fruition of his treachery; and yet, to me, the conviction was less bitter, than was the grief-pang destined to meet your hopes. For hours—for days, did your image fill my prison's solitude; did your sobs live in the night-breeze; did your anguish chase every transient gleaming of repose. Your doubts, your suspense, your wonder, growing into despair, perchance, into reproach. It was a long, a dismal blank in my destiny: privation, and woe, and captivity, hung like a mouldering shroud upon every promise: life was despoiled of her gayest flowers: the rose of hope hung withered; and the thorns, the festering thorns, sharpened by recollection,

rankled and goaded, wellnigh to madness. Embarked and borne on the light wave, quick was my passage to England; and hurried to the isle of Purbeck, and plunged into the dismal keep of Corfe Castle, the rancour and malevolence of the tyrant John spoke in my final doom. In that dismal keep, amid chains, and groans, and despair, death seemed the passport from human misery; and spite of you, my mourning bride, oft did I invoke him, as the sole friend calamity had spared me. Yet even for me, so wounded, and so drooping, in hours of heaviest reflection was there 'balm in Gilead;' balm, extracting the keenest venom from my enemy's sting. It lived, my Matilda, in the remembrance that you had not foundered in my wreck; that placed in security, sojourning with the pious sisters of the church, living, with Heaven in your heart and in your eye, though your life might be dull, heavy, and unsocial, it could neither tempt

tempt violence, nor provoke wrong. Yes, often amid tears of bleeding feeling, did I bless the policy which had given you a bridegroom without a name: for well I knew, that within the reach of king John's power, to bear affinity to the wretched persecuted Le Brun, would be to entail a fate as rayless.

"A long and heavy night had yielded to the saffron tints of coming day: the birds were chirping in gladsome gratitude: and I, wakeful and spirit-bent, my hand supporting my head, my eyes fixed on the thick stancheons hemming me in from freedom, was ruminating on the waywardness of my destiny—on the obduracy of the human heart—on the aggression of king John—on the base perfidy of De Mauleon—on the foul system of persecution and violence, which closing in my days of happiness, inhumed my hopes, my strength, and fame, in a living tomb. Suddenly my thoughts were snatched back by the

sound of a footstep in the passage : it advanced ; it ceased at the door of my prison : the bolts were carefully withdrawn, and a youth, slim, and light, and cloaked in silken tissue, stood before me. Doubt and distrust vanished in the glance ; and when he spoke, hope, like the phoenix, igniting from her own ashes, sprung anew within my bosom.

‘ I come the messenger of glad tidings,’ he exclaimed. ‘ Be thrift of time, I pray you, for safety lies in dispatch.’ And quick did he unfold the blessed prospect of escape ; and filing away the rude gyres of detention, soon emerging from my prison’s solitude, did I gaze upon the blue expanse of sky, and breathe again the fresh pure breeze of heaven !

“ Almost with the rapidity of magic did I pass from England into Normandy ; and there, my Matilda, heedless of the gratulations of friendship, did your image, like a ministering angel of joy and love, beckon me onwards. Holy God !

God! how can I paint my transports, as I neared the bourn of all my hopes; as I toiled o'er distance and dangers to claim my treasure! I pictured you, pale and drooping, like the rose, half bent by the tempest, and needing but the returning sunshine to rally into bloom. My love, my solicitude, my undying interest, would be that vivifying sunshine—I should see you smile upon my endeavours—I should see the glow of health revisit your pale cheek—I should hear you murmur gratulation—I should hail the tender thrill of your sensibility as the prelude to coming bliss. Less vivid, less dazzling, far, is the iris-arch in a summer sky, than was the fairy imagery of my fancy: it conjured all that man can crave on this side heaven; it buoyed me to a height of dizziness; and when the reality burst to view; when, on the site of the peaceful cell of the sisters of St. Claire, a black and shapeless wreck of conflagration and ruin mocked my gaze,



my lifeblood curdled, and all the functions of my nature ceased. The chilly breeze of night, together with the fast falling dew, rallied me back to perception and to misery; to a bitterness, to a sense of bereavement, unknown, unfelt before. Grief had assailed me in a thousand forms; but not in a form like this: heretofore, pride, or mortified feeling, or outraged vanity, had met the blow, had wrestled with the torture; now, every garnered hope seemed lost, and spirit and heart, and very nature, lay prostrate in the ruin. Throughout the whole long night, groaning and acting a maniac's part, I lay among the stones and rubbish, stretched upon the spot where late had stood the altar at which our vows were plighted, and invoking you, my Matilda, freed, as I fancied, from the coil of flesh, and scarce more perfect than in life, to descend and hover near me. Perhaps, as says St. Jerome, 'nothing gives us a greater idea of the dignity

nity of our soul, than that God has given each of us, an angel to have care of it.' I pictured you that angel; and I vowed in the hour of almost frenzied enthusiasm, to cherish, to cling to your memory; to labour out the perfection of my own frail nature, in order to fashion me for a reunion beyond the sky! But why call forth your tears?—why, in this season of thankfulness and joy, knoll forth the dirge of past woe? The dark storm has rolled away; futurity smiles in promise: you are spared to me, and all of present, ill seems light as thistle-down."

"Ah! be it light as thistle-down!" murmured Matilda—"be it but the coinage of our own fears!"

"Doubt it not—fear it not," eagerly replied Le Brun. "The power which heretofore has preserved us, will mercifully sustain us to the end. Tried, but not subdued—chastened, but not o'erwhelmed, our sorrows yield us salutary

counsel; for rank cannot ward from ill, or riches arrest misfortune. We will bear the lesson in our own hearts, my beloved—we will carry it into the solitude of our own choosing. Should we ever forget to be humble, we will recall the vicissitudes of the past, and learn humility in the self-evident wisdom of experience. The morning dawned, my Matilda, and exertion came with reason. I felt myself the veriest wretch on earth; yet vengeance still was spared me; and 'midst the crumbling ruins of your fancied grave, I dedicated life and strength to the propelling spur. Starting from the blank of inaction, and chasing away my blinding tears, I devoted days to strict inquiry: but all my researches could glean nought, save that the prosperous arms of England had swept through the land as a desolating blast; that thousands, like unto myself, writhed beneath the mighty scourge; that the tears of widowhood, the cries of outraged

raged innocence, the groans of tortured  
 feeling, rising to the judgment-seat, ar-  
 raigned the emissaries of the tyrant  
 John. I believed you lost to me for  
 ever; and in the dire bereavement, life  
 ceased to be worth my care. I cased  
 myself in a die as gloomy as my own  
 jaundiced feelings—I sought employ-  
 ment to dissipate thought—I plunged  
 into the thickest of the fray to woo the  
 death-stroke: whole hundreds fell around  
 me: the happy, the prosperous, gasped  
 out life at my side: my breast alone  
 seemed invulnerable to the stroke:  
 steeled, as it were, by fate herself, nought  
 could harm, nought could reach me:  
 showers of missiles fell as hail—I breast-  
 ed the raging tempest of human strife—  
 I strode amid the huge waves of party-  
 malice. The pass to you lay in death:  
 —but for the denouncement of Almighty  
 judgment—but for religion, that pass  
 ———”

He ceased, for the wild cry of Matilda

noted the intensity of her interest ; sobbing, she cast herself upon his neck, as though that keenly awakened sympathy, conjured anew, the past pangs, and the past perils.

“ Blessed be God !” continued Le Brun, soothing, and fondly sustaining her, “ I am here, to still the throes of frightened sensibility, to share in all the doubts of anxious love :—ay, and to pray grace on the murmurs of my late rebellious spirit, and to supplicate submission in the changes of hereafter life.”

Matilda thought of the pending trial, in the departure of the earl to join the standard of the hostile barons, and she wept, and she clung to him, in almost prophetic dread.

“ Bear up, dear one,” he pursued : “ ’tis fitting faith should be exercised and patience tried. Remember, our race of earth lasts but a brief season ; that unless human joy were tempered with ill, man would grow in arrogance, and  
forget

forget to be grateful. God willing, my absence will be short. Should the just cause triumph, a nation's freedom will be the issue; should despotism prevail, still would I that my name swell the list of patriots."

"Surely," said Matilda, "backed by the show of so much force and firmness, the rightful claim cannot fail. The royal John, hailing in one spontaneous voice, the universal suffrage of his people, will not—cannot withhold the grant."

"Then shall we return without a blow," quick resumed Le Brun; "and turning the sword into the ploughshare, together, my Matilda, will we share the good and ill of allotted destiny—together reap the blessings—together stem the snares."

"But not in England—sure, not in England, my lord?" and her eyes brightened in the dear anticipation.

"Sometimes in Ireland; sometimes in France—where duty and where inclina-

tion calls us," answered the earl. " We will strive, my Matilda, to fulfil the purport of our being. The humble virtues are claimed at the hands of humble men; the rich and the powerful must aim at more than mediocrity: preeminence in rank ought ever to be accompanied by preeminence in well-doing; for ensample, in one, emulates to honour, or toils in the witchery of guilt."

" Blessed—blessed destiny !" murmured the grateful Matilda—" to be your choice—to be your acknowledged partner !"

" Wedded, cherished as the better part of myself," rejoined Le Brun ; " the partner of my weal and woe ; the bright star to gild my pilgrimage of earth ! Life now allures with tenfold promise : no more will despair plunge in peril, or spur on to hardihood : fear it not, my Matilda : in necessary absence set your pure mind at rest : my thoughts will fly back to the home of my hopes, and your remem-

remembered love become as a shield of adamant. Holy saints! how vast, how mighty, the contrast, betwixt past and present! Sure, our feelings and our actions, are alike chained down and influenced by circumstances: rich, and conscious of my riches, now I feel the value of my being; now, I bless the truce, which stays from war and blood. A moody and a melancholy man, when through the interposition of the papal see, that truce was first effected, and England and France were alike bound down to three long years of peace, I learned it with sullen discontent, because, to my jaundiced fancy, it seemed to close up the quick and numerous avenues leading to the rest of the grave. Dissatisfied and perturbed, bearing the disease in my own breast—like spirits doomed to the penal fires of purgatory—I wandered without aim and without interest; shrinking away, and marvelling at the hilarity of my fellow-men, and  
murmuring



murmuring at the judgment which tied me down in sufferance. The long disputed castles and seigniory existing betwixt the rival monarchs, savoured something of war: and when my liege lord, Philip Augustus, summoned me to court, and singled me for the championship of France, my heart rallied into human feeling. I hailed the preparation with a reviving spirit—I attributed the new impulse, springing within me, to the desire of conquest; to the ardent hope, of destroying, in one, the claims of king John, and proving myself, in mock or real strife, his steady foe. But it was more, far more, my Matilda: it was the mysterious interposition of that all-merciful Providence, which, by secret passes, and hidden springs, and supernal means, worketh out good in store! I came to England, a discontented mourning widower—I came to England, alive but to the glory of my country's arms, and panting to substantiate my country's

try's preeminence—I came to England, with every spring of sensibility nipped, with every hope of love and promise, chilled and dead within me—I came to England, heedless, hopeless, of hereafter fate: here—here, in England—here——” he ceased—he turned to his blushing smiling bride—he stretched forth his arms, his features glowing, his heart throbbing, his looks, more eloquent than words, expressive of the mighty contrast. Matilda spoke not—she met his eye of love—and alike tremulous, alike beamy, alike impelled by gratitude and transport, she sunk upon his bosom.

CHAPTER VIII.  
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" A deed, to live in the oldest record
Of recorded time !
A spot, bless'd, in this land of blessedness,
Beyond all other !"

To minute the hidden progress of disaffection, which, like insidious fever, tainting the pure springs of life, and banqueting on all of health, raged far and wide throughout the realm ; to tarry at each rallying point, and pierce amid the midnight councils of strength and sapience ; to unfold the gradual scheme, circumventing the giant hold of aristocratic power, and wresting from tyrant hands the iron rod of despotism—would be to diverge from the flower-bespangled path-way of romance, and plunge at once into the dry and erudite
track

track of historic record. - The pen of holy chroniclers have already piloted through the rough sea and heavy breakers of that disastrous period, when church and state combined against the Lord's anointed, and the royal John, deserted by the strength and flower of his nobles, passing the Christmas-day at Worcester, hurried from thence to London, and took up his abode in the new Temple. Tarry we then for one brief moment amid the pompous emblazonment of arms and military bearings; then passing lightly over the earnest appeal of the barons, backed by the show of hostile strength, and glancing at the king's dismay at their warlike assemblage, and positive promise, at the close of the ensuing Easter, to yield them ample and reasonable satisfaction; we dismiss them alike to their separate homes, and as active engines in the one great system of reform, leave them to all the plottings and counter-plottings, and schemes and
manoeuvres.

ramifications, making up the tangled woof of political intrigue.—Ay, and we must note, that our lord the king, more especially to invest himself in the invulnerable armour of righteousness, and circumvent the designs and practices of his hostile nobles—whether from devotion or fear, at the hands of the bishop of London, took upon himself the cross, and vowed an expedition to the holy land—thereby turning, as it should seem, his thoughts to heaven, and exchanging the turmoils of this world, for the hopes of blessedness in the next. But soon were his thoughts and hopes alike snatched back from the high pinnacle to which he had reared them : for Matthew Paris acquaints us, that in the ensuing Easter week, armed and accoutred, the strength and flower of the nobles assembled at Stamford ; that their next rendezvous was at Brackley in Northamptonshire ; and that at Brackley, elated with their numbers and great strength, they resolutely

lutely delivered to the archbishop of Canterbury, and William Marshall, earl of Pembroke, deputed by the king, the schedule, containing the laws of king Edward, and the free customs and liberties of other preceding monarchs, boldly declaring, that unless king John would grant and confirm under his own seal such free customs and liberties, they would proceed forthwith to levy war upon his towns, castles, and possessions, and force him, by dint of arms, to unqualified submission. The like obstinate adhesion of king and subjects plunged England into all the horrors of civil war; and we cannot perhaps give a juster cause for the then existing misery, than by quoting the words of one of the learned penmen of the chronicle of Mailros, the abbot of Dundrainand, who living at that period, and being by birth a Scotchman, may be supposed to speak with impartiality and truth. "England," he wrote, "was now in a strange confusion,

confusion, so that 'tis wonderful to relate it; and who hath ever heard the like? for the body desired to rule the head, the people would govern their king: yet divers reasons required it; for he perverted the ancient approved customs and laws of this kingdom, and did not govern his people with equity; but his will was to him the only law: he oppressed his own subjects, and preferred barbarous mercenaries before them; he destroyed the lawful heirs that were delivered as pledges to him, and strangers enjoyed their inheritances."

Very many treaties were essayed and failed ere the first blow gave signal for succeeding bloodshed; and at Brackley, the conclusive message of the king, *that he would never grant such liberties as would make himself a slave*, excited the barons to renounce all homage, and blow at once the blast of defiance. At Brackley, the lord Robert Fitz-Walter was chosen general, by title, the mareschal
of

of the army of God and of holy church ; and from Brackley—perchance, inspired with our national love for laws and liberty, and craving to taste the blessings they laboured out for posterity—like an impetuous tide, panting to vindicate the honour and independence of their country, the high spirited and gallant hosts advanced towards Northampton, nor halted till beneath its castle walls. But after a successful siege of fifteen days, for lack of proper engines to effect a breach, raising the siege, they passed forthwith to Bedford Castle : from thence to Ware : and on the twenty-fourth of May, ere yet the sun had drank the dew-drops from the new-blown flowers—whilst eye, and mind, and ear, alike were tranced in deep devotion, noiseless and still, entering at Aldgate, they reared the rebel standard in the heart of London. Quick dispersing their guards, and stationing them at every gate, and furnishing themselves with battering

rams and warlike engines, we next read of their besieging the Tower ; and we further learn, by Matthew Paris, that special notices were issued to all those nobles still adhering to the royal cause, threatening the destruction of their orchards, parks, and warrens ; the firing and razing their houses and castles ; the levying instant war, and the treating them as the one common enemy, unless they forthwith joined the great confederacy :—and in the list of those nobles, we find the name of William de Cantilupe, the father of the lord George and the lady Millicent, for the first time—perchance, from necessity—swelling the huge muster-roll of the patriot strength.

But vain would I portray the universal discomfiture and misery ; vain would I contrast the new bland reign of unanimity, prosperity, and order, with the then fell horrors of civil contention and jarring strife ! Such was the general stretch of defection, the rapid growth of
the

the monster Discord, the dire force of contaminating example—that throughout England, scarce a subject could be found, to pay the king, his due of honour, or subsidy. All was confusion, strife, and bloodshed: the beneficence of the Creator turned into waste—the promised harvest trampled under foot—hamlets and fastnesses despoiled and smoking—whole towns, ransacked and broken down, by the wanton hand of mad intemperance: men, cloaking crime beneath pretended zeal, craving, like locusts, the honey of the land; and individual rancour, and long germinating hate, and every sin, classed in the black catalogue of human turpitude, cowering under the one prostituted covering of patriotism! But, alas! even in this our own day, we recall, and we shudder at the spent storm, late, so loud, and so death-fraught; at the crying specimen of what man can be, when he renounces order, and forswears rule—when, like the

the untamed and savage tenant of the forest, he yields to the headlong instinct of his passions, thereby confirming, the sad, the humiliating, the harsh, but true lesson, in Nature's mysterious chain, how slender the link which divides him from the brute ! But to return to the rough surges, then sweeping over the green pastures of England ; to return to the existing scourge, labouring out good to come.

We find, by the fathers of the church, that at Odiham, in Hampshire, his retinue dwindled to, the miserable remnant of seven knights, king John, alone and lonely, and brooding over gins and traps, and future trains of murder and revenge, awed by the cold courage and vigorous perseverance of the adverse barons, submitted at discretion.

At RUNNEMEDE was the vital conference appointed : and on the fifteenth of June, one thousand two hundred and fifteen,

fifteen, when the days are nigh the longest, and the sun shines the brightest—when all of creation, spreads and glows, and ripens, and fructifies to perfection—in that smooth green meadow!—that precious spot of earth, snatched from oblivious time, and stamped by the iron pen of truth and fame on the immortal archives of our country!—that birthplace of our liberty!—that mead, so renowned, and so blessed, assembled all the nerve, the vigour, and the glory of England! What though whole ages have matured the record—what though the oak and the sapling have alike bowed 'neath time's mildew—what though the blast of the winter, and the gale of the spring, have felled and reared earth's blossoms—what though the warriors are passed away, and their empty halls, and their desolate courts, yield shelter to the night-bird—what though their tombs are scarce known, their birthplace clean forgotten; their fame survives the wreck;

for " the song shall preserve their name ;
future times shall hear of them ! "

Pitching their tents in the one meadow, though apart as open foes, and unfurling to the summer breeze, their symbols, and trophies, and triumphant banners, three successive days were yielded to debate and treaty. On the fourth, the nineteenth of June, amidst an assembled host, numerous and mighty as the waves of ocean—the heavens smiling in auspicious omen ; the glorious sun, chasing every flaky vapour, and pouring his liquid fire on the steel suits and nodding plumes of the warriors—king John, instigated by his own fears, rather than by the entreaties of his counsellors, signed and sealed the **GREAT CHARTER** ! securing to the clergy, to the nobles, to the people, to every degree and order of men, the important grant of their liberty and privileges ! Loud and reiterated was the shout which burst from every tongue, as the
king

king committed to the hands of the nobles, appointed to see and to enforce its faithful observance, the important schedules. It was a shout of transport, of almost maddened exultation; it reverberated like pealing thunder—it seemed to rend the vaulted sky: and when the shout died away, and when the shrill blast of commingling trumpets ceased—when every eye beamed transport, every heart thrilled gratitude, an aged solitary man, stepping from the throng, cast himself impulsively on the earth. He lay for many moments, panting and labouring with wild and complicated feeling, and looking like the seers of ancient story, or as some age-bowed patriarch, laden with the rust and honours of time: for his form, upheld by a pilgrim's staff, was thin, and wasted, and wellnigh shadowy; his shorn crown, bent, as the tempest-battered oak; and his beard, bleached to silver whiteness, swept nearly to his girdle. Raising

himself upon his knees, and elevating his hands and his eyes towards heaven—"The glory of the Lord be upon us!" he pronounced, in a voice so shrill and deep, that it pierced mid each corner of the vast concourse. "The grace of the Highest! Joy be in our hearts! Hallelujahs on our tongues! Burst we forth in the *te-deums* of the righteous! Shout we the psalmody of the blessed! I have lived to see this day, and it shall be hallowed amongst men! I have toiled o'er the face of the deep waters—I have sojourned in deserts and in caves—I have dragged my wearied limbs back from the blessed sepulchre of the crucified Jesus; and here, at Runnemedé, I hail the daystar of liberty—I glory in the bright dawning of a nation's freedom! Joy—joy to the sons of earth! joy—joy to the sons of England! When our bones shall be mouldered into dust—when our dust shall be scattered by the winds of heaven—when the sarcophagus
of

of the prince, and the headstone of the peasant, shall have crumbled and shrunk away—when the hillock shall be trampled flat, and the cradle of our rest be forgotten—fresh, and new, and green, as spring's verdure, this CHARTER shall live, shall germinate prosperity, shall bud, shall blossom, shall thrive throughout this land! This CHARTER, shall be hailed, shall be hallowed, as the palladium of England's blessedness; and RUNNEMEDE, as the Bethlehem of England's terrestrial good!"

He rose, and he leant upon his staff, subdued and trembling; yet, as he raised his skeleton hand to wipe from his forehead the damp cold sweat, as he turned to face the summer breeze, a smile, emanating in piety and faith, shone as a halo around his countenance: it was that effulgent soul-beam, which springing from native beneficence, proclaims charity and Christian love to man!—"And now," he pursued, moving slowly

ly forward, his accent broken by emotion and high-wrought feeling—"now for the fulfilment of my last duty of earth;—now to seek the presence of the lord Walter de Lacey; and then, Dennis Fitzgerald, thou mayest toil back to thy convent, and sink to sleep amid thy brethren."

"Friar Dennis, of Mellifont Abbey, near Drogheda, in the county of Louth!" shouted a voice; and spite of king and nobles, O'Carroll pressed to the side of the holy man.

The friar looked up.—"What cravest thou at the hands of the monk Dennis?" he asked.

"The confession of one Symmachus O'Chahargy," quick replied O'Carroll, snatching at his serge cloak, and gazing wistfully in his face. "By the powers! and I would be after serving the lady Margaret de Verdon. She is the foster-child of my own dead master; and his
confession,

confession, forsooth, profiteth none like unto herself !”

“ Holy Jesu !” ejaculated the friar ; then, after the pause of a moment—
“ Not into thy hands, my son,” he resumed, “ but into the hands of Walter de Lacey, earl of Meath, would I yield the confession of Symmachus O’Chahargy.”

“ Arrah, now, and thou wouldst give the confession of my dead master into the hands of my own live master ! and thou wouldst——”

He ceased, for De Lacey stood at the side of the friar.—“ I am the man thou seekest, holy father,” he exclaimed—
“ I am the De Lacey, who at the lips of the dying Symmachus O’Chahargy, craveth, at thy hands, his confession.”

“ Thou—thou, my son ! Mighty God !” and the friar tottered back ; then meekly crossing his breast and forehead—
“ Didst thou comfort the poor sinner in his uttermost need ?” he demanded.

“ Didst thou pour oil into the bleeding wounds of his conscience? Didst thou know thyself aggrieved, and stay the curse?”

“ I stood by the cold clay of the murderer of my father,” solemnly replied De Lacey, “ yet I remembered my own insufficiency, and I prayed mercy on his trespasses.”

The friar stepped close to De Lacey—he placed his hand upon his arm—he looked steadfastly in his face—“ Knowest thou aught beyond?” he asked—“ Knowest thou aught of other injury?”

“ None, father,” said De Lacey, “ which man may not forgive in man.”

“ Nought of the slow poison of revenge?” pursued the holy Dennis—“ nought of the invidious caustic, generated in hell, and fashioned to the spur of malice?”

“ No, father; aught else I have yet to learn.”

“ The ant,” remarked the friar, “ may sting

sting the lion: the dog may bay at the heels of the elephant."

"True, father," quick rejoined De Lacey: "but the lion spurgeth the pig: my vengeance; the elephant turneth not to crush his life out."

"Sure, thou art in thy conclusions, a philosopher, my lord; in thy deeds, a philanthropist."

The earl bowed.—"Adversity," he said, "enforces the lesson which prosperity cannot teach. Adversity has taught me to shudder at the blast which desolates my fellow-man; for alas! it has swept over my own head, and shorn me of my honours. But let us to the solitude of my tent, holy sir: the universal joy and exultation is ill fitted to the counter emotions of the soul: peradventure—for thy prelude bespeaketh it—thou mayest draw heavy draughts upon my feelings; and here," and he glanced around, "feeling may be ycleped weakness."

“ Man judgeth by the fitful start of his own humour,” observed the friar, moving forward ; “ he kens not beyond the eye ; he dives not beyond the shallow stretch of his own judgment. Ay, my son, ’tis a tale fitting to privacy ; for it savoureth of miracle, and it needeth the full stretch of Christian fortitude.”

“ Now, father,” said De Lacey, reclosing the canvas entrance of the tent, and turning, with a heart, firm, and a brow unruffled.

The friar drew from his bosom, a parchment, folded, and carefully preserved.—“ This is the copy,” he said ; “ but ’tis a true copy : the original layeth in the hands of the pious abbot of my own convent.”

“ At Mellifont Abbey ?” asked the earl.

“ Ay, my lord, at Mellifont Abbey, in the county of Louth, I deposited it in holy keeping, lest mischance should befall me ; for man is as grass ; he flourisheth

eth to-day, and he fadeth to-morrow !
Had I died in distant Palestine—had
God willed that my bones had moulder-
ed in the land of promise—this copy,
perchance, had perished with me. Yet
was my mind at rest ; for I had penned
my wishes, and together with the true
confession of Symmachus O'Chahargy,
taken from his own lips, and signed by
his own seal, had I consigned it to the
keeping of the lord abbot, praying him,
at the expiration of the third year of my
pilgrimage, to open, and to read, and to
follow the pure dictates of justice and
brotherly love."

De Lacey stretched forth his hand to
take the important document, but the
friar still withheld it.—" My son," he
resumed, " tax not thy powers too high-
ly. Philosophy may teach endurance,
but 'tis Christianity alone which can fit
to the mighty influx of overwhelming
good : the flower which buffets the tem-
pest, may be scorched in the sunbeam."

“ Good,” repeated the earl, in an accent doubtful and incredulous—“ say, father, what further good can reach me in this vale of tears ? Snatched from the lowest abyss of despondence, blessed be God, I am now a happy father, and a prosperous man ! Ireland, the precious isle of my birth, holds forth an abiding-place : and though affliction has numbed my energies, and blighted my strength ; though I return to its green shores, with a head frosted by care and sorrow, still will Ireland be my abiding-place, and Irish earth cradle my last rest.”

“ Answer me, my son,” said friar Dennis, drawing close beside him, “ and judge it not the prying curiosity of age. When expelled by violence and power, thou didst fly thy rich seigniory, and crave safety on foreign shore, didst thou leave behind thee, no existing tie of anxiety and hope ? When thou didst bear away thy last born Matilda, hadst thou no thought for thy first born Margaret ?
—hadst

—hadst thou——” He ceased, for the wild cry of De Lacey, alarmed him for his safety : he gasped for breath ; convulsive spasms shook his limbs, and his cheeks and his lips grew bloodless. “ I pray thee, take comfort, my lord,” pursued the friar. “ Alas ! in this world, man often lives the dupe and the victim of the wily and the hard of heart : peradventure, it be to impress upon us, the shallowness of our own foresight”—and he crossed his bosom as he spoke, and he stood watchful and irresolute.

“ Go on—go on,” urged the earl—“ I can meet the probe—I can hear all—I can bear all. Yes, yes, holy sir”—and he writhed in the pang within—“ when we fled before the death-scurge of John, we left behind us, a girl—a darling girl, tender, and young, and innocent, and helpless. We left her to die ; we——”

“ Who saw her die ?” interrupted the friar. “ Who closed her eyes ? Who laid her in earth ?”

“ Not

"Not her father—not her mother," quick replied De Lacey, and he spoke with bitterness and anguish: "no, no, no! her mother, her blessed mother, sickened, and drooped, and sunk away in the consciousness. It was I, whom neither grief nor sorrow could kill:—ay, father, it was I, who heaped on their harmless heads, all this crushing woe; and yet, tough and stubborn, I survived it all. Oh, God! I could paint such scenes—I could tell of such misery! But I cry pardon, holy sir," struggling, and striving to smile; "self is irrelevant—I pray of the confession of this Symmachus O'Chahargy."

"'Tis true, my son," said the friar, "we live not in an age of miracle: yet even in this our day, there oft befall events, savouring of miracle, and baffling our weak computation. Think well, if ever thou didst arm this man, Symmachus O'Chahargy, to thy own hindrance."

"Never,

“ Never, so help me, Heaven!” ejaculated De Lacey.

“ Dost thou tax memory even to the stretch of years?” interrogated father Dennis. “ Think, when thou didst first behold thy own wedded Margaret—when thou didst win her from the persevering love of the rejected lord of Kilbarrock.” De Lacey shuddered; thought and care gathered on his brow, for memory lighted on a field of blood. “ I would not wound thee,” pursued the friar—“ I would but shed light on human action; for sure, the heart, however black, gendereth not the poison of revenge, unless spurred by real or imagined injury.”

“ Still,” said the earl, mournfully, “ I can couple O’Chahargy with nought of the deeds of my youth.”

“ Knowest thou not,” asked the friar, “ that Symmachus O’Chahargy was the foster-brother of John de Courson, lord of Rathenny and Kilbarrock?—that the
mother

mother of Symmachus O'Chahargy, nurtured the lord of Rathenny and Kilbarrock at her own breast?"

De Lacey pressed his hand upon his forehead; he yielded for many moments to deep thought—then looking up—"Thou dost confound me," he exclaimed. "On my soul, I knew nought of this matter; yet would I learn all;" and he snatched at the parchment still in the hand of the friar.

"John de Courson, lord of Rathenny and Kilbarrock, fell lucklessly by thy hand," rejoined father Dennis, still retaining the parchment: "no mortal eye witnessed the conflict; and thou wert attainted with the crime and the cognizance of murder."

"Our fates," said the earl, solemnly, "might have chanced counter. By the heaven we crave after, no assassin's steel pierced the bosom of Kilbarrock. We met, and he fell in honourable strife."

"I do believe thee," quick returned
the

the friar. “ But the man, Symmachus O’Chahargy, on the blood-stained corse of his foster-brother, swore revenge :— revenge, my son, fashioneth its own course :— his, God-wot, was a subtle course ! When thou didst fly to France, thy babe, thy first-born Margaret, was, for the lack of strength and health, away in thy castle of Killin. She——” He fixed his eyes steadfastly on De Lacey —“ No miracle is wrought, my good lord. Thy Margaret is not risen from the grave ; because—thy Margaret has never yet tenanted the grave.—What though thy Margaret be the wedded wife of the lord Theobald de Verdon ; what ——”

“ Hold ! hold !” implored De Lacey, and tightly he pressed his breast, for emotion rose almost to suffocation.

“ Life is a tangled woof,” resumed the holy Dennis ; “ thick dotted with good and ill : the ill has passed away, my son ; the good riseth as a daystar in the horizon.

horizon. May it shine brighter and brighter to the end! Yet is stability not of earth; for all of earth is shadow: man sinketh in the boast of his strength;—man riseth in the moment of o'erwhelming weakness!"

De Lacey looked up; he spoke not, but he smiled through his deluging tears: he stretched forth his hand to receive the parchment, and the next instant he found himself alone:—and whilst, with a heart throbbing and labouring with counter feelings, glorifying Heaven for the rich blessing so mercifully vouchsafed, and rejoicing and weeping—by snatches he deciphered the mad contentions of bigotry and revenge; the wild inconsistencies of an alternately bitter and stricken spirit, portrayed in the confession of Symmachus O'Chahargy; be it for me, aided by the rude documents preserved through the rust of time—by "the words of the bards in the days of song"—by "the tales of
other

other times"—by the flights of a wild and sportive fancy—to seize the clue-string, and succinctly threading each ramification of the complicated labyrinth, to cast light on the strangely chequered destinies of those "sons of green Erin," who once, in the days of their fame, moved, "like roaring waves, that tumble round a rock; the mariners looked on their strife with fear."

CHAPTER IX.



"Be it the retrospect of years gone by,
Stol'n from oblivious all consuming time—
A slight but faithful annal of the past."

THE attentive perusal of the early chronicles, substantiates man, from the furthest stretch of recorded time, until now, to be the creature of his passions, made up of inconsistency, and living a paradox,

paradox, even to himself. Is it marvel then, that strange and wild stories, like monstrous excrescences, noting the sports of nature, oftentimes disarrange the common current of the moral world, and turn the calm and healthful spring, into wide and measureless disorder? In those elaborate pages, the labour and the imperishable monuments of the fathers of the church, we read, that sir Hugh de Lacey, a renowned and valiant warrior, great in deeds, and mighty in arms, in the reign of our second Henry, when Ireland was first subdued, and annexed to the crown of England, moved as a desolating whirlwind; that striding in conquest and in blood, dizzy with success and drunk with victory, he forgot all those softer claims upon the heart, known in sympathy and in fellow feeling; that like other conquerors, emboldened in his own prowess, and glorying in his own strength, he forgot, that however courage stamps the soldier, 'tis mercy,

mercy, and mercy alone, which radiates the track of the hero!

It is not for us to wade through the seas of blood, marking the strife of party, or to linger over the rancour and heartburnings gendering in defeat and overthrow; for however thousands may yield the ready tribute of admiration to the adventurous and the brave, one distempered and hidden foe, bosoming hate and vengeance, may effect more than whole thousands can qualify.

The subjugation of Ireland was as a brighter speck in the bright reign of king Henry the Second: and we find, in the annals of Ireland, that on its subjugation to the prosperous arms of that warlike monarch, sir Hugh de Lacey, girt with the sword of the earldom of Ulster, received in fee the whole counties of Ulster and of Meath:—we also find, in tracking the elaborate wanderings of Camden's chorographical description of Ireland, that much of his rich
revenue

revenue must have been devoted to the erection of castles and fortresses, as though, in the vain glory of man, to perpetuate his name to latest posterity : and twelve years afterwards, we find, that in superintending the building of a castle at Derwath, he was treacherously murdered, by an Irishman, called Symmachus O'Chahargy. But passing rapidly over the grief and indignation felt and expressed by his two surviving sons, Walter and Hugh, the lords of Meath and Ulster, and simply noting, that the body of the murdered warrior was inhumed in the monastery of Beetil, his head in the abbey of Thomas-court in Dublin, we must quickly veer from the state and solemnity of the dull and gloomy pageant, to bring into notice, the individual avenger of his country's fall.

It is not riches or nobleness of descent which stamps the character or refines the impulses of the human heart : wild and
fitful

fitful have ever been the caprices of nature: sometimes, like the gem of purest water, cast fathoms deep within the mine, she grafts worth and native greatness on lowly and unlettered mediocrity; sometimes, on the long lineal stem of noble ancestry, the germ shoots but a worthless weed.

Symmachus O'Chahargy was the foster-brother of sir John de Courson, lord of Rathenny and Kilbarrock; and Symmachus O'Chahargy, though but the son of a simple hind, possessed a mind cast in no common mould; a mind, writhing beneath the sting of credited abasement, and framed and fashioned to the subtle inroads of the arch enemy of mankind; a mind, as a fallow field, unsown, unstored, alike open to the genial influence of culture, or to the rank tares, choking up all which is choice and good: —alternately a fanatic and a patriot; now tracing the scourge of God in the pending mischief; now pining to substantiate

stantiate his rights, even at the peril of life! The sword of sir Hugh de Lacey had rendered him homeless and destitute; the soldiery of sir Hugh de Lacey, had trampled down his fields, rifled his little store, hurried into eternity, the scared spirit of his suffering mother, and turned him, with indignity and misery heaped upon his head, into the wide cold world. He bosomed revenge, even to the total overthrow of all that was kindly in his nature; to the discomfiture of all that was just, and all that was humane: he watched but the moment for action; and when reduced to manual toil, as an artisan, he aided in accomplishing the gigantic plans and desires of the conqueror of his native province—in erecting the trophies of his greatness and his power—when at Derwath, he was laying the foundation of a future castle, gloom and opportunity conspiring against all of lingering feeling, from
comparative

comparative innocence, plunged him headlong into guilt.

It was the evening hour—the hour, when man craves cessation from his diurnal toils—when invited to peace and rest, he seeks the blessing of his humble home. One by one the fellow-labourers of O'Chahargy had retired; and moody and thoughtful, with his axe in his hand, he stood, revising the past, and marvelling why his spirit was fashioned so counter to his fortune; recalling the happy home from which he had been driven, and conjuring anew the voice of his long-buried mother. A step, and a rustling noise, rallied from absorption: he looked up; he saw, unattended and unsuspecting, him, whose conquering arm had dealt the universal ruin. It was the earl of Ulster, wooing the evening breeze, and inspecting the growing progress of his plans. Opportunity, importunity, rage, and hell, gathered in the breast of O'Chahargy: he bowed his

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head, to hide the demoniacal league ; he thought of nought, save the overthrow of his country, save the long-hoarded wrong. He was alone—he was unmarked. What was it that the eye of God was on him?—passion smothered the consciousness—and the devil, like unto his instigation of our first parents, egged him to the precipice.

The earl crossed to his side ; he spoke of the rising edifice ; he stooped forward to examine something in the foundation-stones. O'Chahargy raised the axe—it fell—it severed the head of his victim. Like the fratricide Cain, in one little instant, he was steeped in the blood of his fellow-man. Remorse arose when all power of reparation was passed : the trunk, spouting the lifeblood, lay at his feet ; the head, the features, still quivered in the mortal agony. He cast away the axe—he stood, statue-like, stiffened, as it were in horror, at his own deed—he had snapped the thread of human existence—

istence—he had dismissed a soul, laden with error and with crime, into the awful depths of a measureless eternity. What though he were a stranger—though he were an invader—though the green fields of Ireland, through him, had been saturated with the blood of her sons! blood cried up to the judgment-seat; and the blood of that one solitary man, doomed him to the fell purgatory of an evil conscience. Wild and disordered he fled away from human judgment; and in craving, and in receiving shelter at the hands of his foster-brother, the lord of Kilbarrock, that fatal feud, existing betwixt the houses of De Courson and De Lacey, was sown; a feud, cherished and fed by combining circumstances, and closing, on the one side, in after death, on the other, in ruin and exile.

In thus unreaving the hidden springs working to the general *eclaircissement* of our story, we next find, Walter and

Hugh de Lacey, the lords of Meath and Ulster, tracking the flower-bespangled pathway of prosperous destiny. Young, and rich, and well favoured; buoyant, light, free from care, and strangers to incertitude, we find them, striding, like their warlike sire, through the plains of conquest, and bearing away the rich palm of preeminence and honour. Hugh lived but for renown and enterprise. The heart of Walter was cast in a softer mould.

It was at the dedication of the monastery called De Voto, to Christ and the Virgin Mary, built at Tintern, by William, earl-marshal, and of Pembroke, as a grateful offering to Heaven for having escaped the peril of storm and shipwreck, that in the train of the countess, he first beheld the portionless and untitled Margaret de Lancey. Oft had he fluttered around the flame of beauty; but never had he paid more than the mere tribute of the eye: now, he bore
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in his bosom, the angel form of the unconscious orphan. She was young—she was lovely—she was sweet to look upon! As Malvina, in Ossian's book of *Temora*—“ Like the bow of the shower, in the secret valley of streams ; bright, but the drops of heaven rolled on its blended light. Fair in her looks, but on her brightness were the wanderings of tears.” She was the last of a fallen race ; and now, in conformity to her wrecked and bankrupt fortune, she wooed the smiles, and dared the caprices of the great and the happy. •

The slave of impulse, and borne on the full tide of prosperous fortune, the earl of Meath read sorrow in that soft eye ; and such was the trammel on his feelings, that he followed to Kildare, and he bore his suit even to Mainoth Castle. The beautiful Margaret smiled upon his hopes ; the countess of Pembroke too vouchsafed him favour ;—but alas ! “ in tale or history the page of true love ne-

ver doth run smooth." The lord of Kilbarrock had seen the maid—had gazed with loose unlicensed eye—had blistered her pure ear with the unhallowed fire of lawless passion. She had spurned, she had repulsed his ardour; but fearful of hereafter reckoning, she had smothered the hateful secret.

The night previous to the bridal morn, when all of transport lived in the breast of the lover, and all of timid, bashful, beamy diffidence, glowed on the cheeks, and spoke in the downcast eyes of the maid; wandering amid enamelled lawns and verdant bowers, they watched the farewell glories of a setting sun, turning,

" With the splendour of his precious ray,
The meagre, cloddy earth, to glittering gold ;"

and wrapt and entranced in soft endearing intercourse, fancying bliss their own, and happiness real and substantial. It was the dream of the morrow, which lived in their hearts and in their looks ;
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it was the bland assurance of reciprocal love, which tinged their own hopes with rays brighter than the bright west, now dappling, the hills, the rocks, the woods, and the waters, in rich and wellnigh unearthly splendour. Arm linked in arm, they had lost e'en the outline of the castle turrets ; and not until the purple and crimson clouds fast shadowed into grey, did they turn to retrack their footsteps. How could disaster scare in such an hour? — how could danger light midst such a field? Walter breathed nought, save the soft whispers of love; and when, in a shadowy nook, he felt the sudden start of the gentle Margaret, he smiled at her conjured terrors.

“ Let us haste, my lord,” she implored. “ Sure I heard more than the night breeze.”

“ Perchance the nightingale wailing for its mate,” said De Lacey : “ nought else, my Margaret ;” for he read terror in the faded tint of her cheek. “ Think-

est thou, aught can harm, when I am at thy side?" and bold in the consciousness of approval, he passed his arm around her waist, and hurried onwards

Margaret tried to banish fear; tried to rally back her smiles; but oft as she pressed forward, with a tread, so light, that it might

" Bestride the gossamers,
That idle in the wanton summer air,
And yet not fall,"

did she glance around, as though amidst the bushes and underwood. she guessed espial.

They had passed from the nook, and they had crossed the angle of a wild heath, and one narrow arm of a pine forest alone lay betwixt them and the castle. Margaret felt her spirits revive—felt her heart beat calmer—felt secure of home; and the blush glowed anew upon her cheek, and the sportive jest at her own terror arose to her lips. Alas! it was a security

security vain and premature. Scarce had the dark boughs closed out the arch of heaven, when that security yielded to outrage and horror. A loud rustling gathered midst the low branches, and De Lacey, in his turn, paused and gazed around.

“ It is more than the wind—I am sure it is more than the wind,” exclaimed the agitated Margaret, and tightly she clung to his arm. “ Danger threatens ; treachery lurks around. I saw a man shrink deeper into yon shadow”—and then she uttered a fearful cry, for the lord of Kilbarroek stood in the pathway.

Sudden almost as the burst of electric fire was the act and the effect : De Lacey caught at his sword, but his arm was withheld by the uncourtly followers of the ravisher : vain were his threats and his struggles : wounded and disabled, his betrothed bride was torn from his side ; and when awakening from the astounding blow, when reviving to exertion and to consciousness, the shades of night had

gathered into utter darkness, and he found himself, alone, and bleeding, on the dew-steeped grass. Perhaps the pang of that hour, was pungent, as the keenest pang of mortal endurance.—He arose—he tried to drag himself forward; but weakness and misery had wasted all his strength; the film of the grave felt to thicken before his eyes; all of this world to pass away—and with one heart-piercing groan, he sunk again into insensibility.

He awoke, not to sufferance, but to exultation: he found himself, not in a lone and dreary wilderness, but reclining on a down bed in the castle of Mainoth. Was it reality?—or was it the bliss-fraught deceptions of vision? Was it the fairy hand of Margaret which smoothed his pillow?—was it the form of his brother Hugh who hovered at his side? Yes, it was his brother Hugh! It was the brave earl of Ulster, the saviour of his betrothed Margaret! the earl of Ulster, who in hastening to witness

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ness the plighting of wedded faith, had crossed the track of the lawless ravisher, and rescued the shrieking bride from pending ruin.

This last, this deadly breach of all the rights of social order, added fresh fuel to the already kindled pile of party-hate; and even in the arms of his wedded Margaret, the lord of Meath swore utter and bitter enmity to the lord of Kilbarrock. Months and years wore away—for time stays not his quick revolving movements—and happiness, unclouded and unalloyed, beamed o’er the fortunes of De Lacey. Margaret, his first born, already lisped the endearing name of father—Matilda nestled a lovely infant in her mother’s arms! But happiness, unclouded and unalloyed, is not the lot of earth: whether the storm ride on the nod of Omnipotence, or whether it gather in the fitfulness of our own conduct, it does gather, and it does destroy! Peradventure it be to warn us of the in-

stability of human things, to wean us from the ties, which counterwise might hold too tightly.

The sudden and violent death of the lion-hearted Richard, had, to the disparagement of prince Arthur, the lawful heir, instituted prince John, the earl of Mortaigne, into all his vast possessions ; and the luckless opposition of the house of Lacey to some unjust stretch of arbitrary prerogative, had cast upon their names and interests, the mildew of dark displeasure. It was under these hapless auspices, that in a deep dingle, scarce five miles from Dublin, chance encountered, face to face, the lords of Meath and Kilbarrock. The long smothered hate revived with tenfold virulence ; invective and recrimination ensued ; no time was given to reflection or to reason ; each alike flew to arms ; their swords were unsheathed—and fortune, in stretching Kilbarrock, bleeding and dying on the earth, wrought the total ruin of De Lacey's

Lacey's earthly prospects. What was it, that all of rancour flitted with the breath of the dying man—that Walter knelt beside him, and pillowed his heavy head on his own bosom—that he shed over him the tears of remorse and anguish! Those bitter tears could not expunge the stroke, could not stay the heart's-blood; that deep and stinging remorse, could not woo back life into the lifeless clay. Oh, no, no! the rage of a moment may blast what long years cannot renovate; the deed of a moment may effect, what repentance and agony can never expunge!

The dead body of the lord of Kilbarrock was found by his foster-brother Symmachus O'Chahargy, and the sword, bearing on its hilt, the name and arms of De Lacey, gave incontrovertible testimony of the murderer. Rage and hate usurped every better feeling; the tale, with every aggravation of malice, was forthwith borne to the ear of king John; past

past actions were tortured into treason;—and ere Kilbarrock was consigned to the rest of all flesh, the ban of attainure was passed, and the ruin of the De Lacey's completed.

Time had been when Walter would have resisted an injustice so flagrant; when, at the head of his hardy clan, he would have bearded the tyrant, and maintained, to the despite of life, his born prerogative: but then his hands were clean washed from the stain of blood; now, the spring and the fire of his enmity were set in the grave of his fallen foe. Worlds would he have given to have restored the life he had sacrificed. The dying groan, the last convulsion of Kilbarrock, was ever before him: when weeping forth his crime on the bosom of his wedded Margaret, it pursued, it pierced his ear—it swam before his sight in a sea of blood.

With a great fleet, and a strong army, king John landed in Ireland, and soon
were

were all the horrors of anticipated ruin realized. The vengeance was quick and sure: it gathered like the thunder-storm, but it spread deeper and wider desolation. Symmachus O'Chahargy, panting with rage and hate, led on the hosts, detached to scour the rich possessions, and seize the persons of the proscribed De Laceys.

It was dark night, and the countess was nurturing the infant Matilda at her bosom: suddenly a loud din of commingling sounds rose from the nigh hamlet: shrieks, and yells, and shouts, and execrations, and all proclaiming the work of hell. The alarm-bell rang from the warder's tower; the castle caught the wild commotion; a lurid flame arose from the fired houses, and spread a red and dismal glare around. Stricken, as it were, to stone—trembling and gasping for breath—yet still sustaining her baby in her arms, the countess pressed to the casement. Brighter and brighter
burned

burned the fire; louder and louder grew the roar and rage of battle: she saw the fearful glimmer of swords; she heard the astounding blows of the battleaxe, the battering of walls, the falling of rafters, the wide and wild horror of war and death. She listened—she held in her breath—she shuddered at every fresh burst which broke on the night's stillness: but she uttered no shriek, even when her own arm was grasped suddenly and wildly. It was her husband—it was the wretched stricken De Lacey, upheld, dragged to her side, by a man in hireling guise.

“Let wife and child rally to exertion,” pronounced the well-remembered voice of the earl of Ulster. “Rouse thyself, Walter: fly from this ravage, or behold wife and child bleeding at thy feet.”

The appeal was resistless. Mantled by the gloom of night, and passing by a back postern—when the soldiers of king John burst like an o’erwhelming flood

flood into the castle—the lord of the castle, with those who linked him to life, was a wanderer on the wide waste, his bed the earth, his canopy the arched sky! Fearful was the moment, when, in comparative safety, recollection dawned: the countess glanced around, and clasping her baby tighter to her bosom, she uttered a cry of desolate misery. 'Twas then that all of the mother tugged at her heartstrings:—her young, her playful, her innocent Margaret, together with her nurse and attendants, sojourning, to woo strength in the sea-breeze, in the distant castle of Killin, seemed shut away from her reach, as though by the bonds of the grave. All of reasoning failed to sooth the mother's anguish, to still the mother's fears: stricken as if with frenzy, on her knees she besought an immediate removal to Killin: and when Hugh, agonized and grief-struck, glancing at the existing ill, pronounced the dire impossibility, she fell

fell motionless upon the earth. The tears and the lamentations of Walter, together with the cold waters of the spring, restored animation : and throughout that long night of misery, did she lay still and silent, and nobly wrestling with the anguish of her spirit. Though her form was light as any fairy—her features, soft and fair to look upon—she possessed a mind needing but the quickening spur of necessity, to rally into almost masculine strength. Heretofore she had basked in the sunny ray of health and happiness; she had felt nought save the balmy breeze of prosperity : now, winter's iron blast aimed at the root of her fortune, and scattered blight on all her budding hopes ! At day-dawn, all of weakness had fled : she had prayed for grace, and she had argued, and she had methodized her feelings ; and when she looked up, and when she met the almost-maddened glance of her husband, she forced a kindly
ly

ly smile, as she stretched her hand towards him.

"It has pleased Heaven to visit us with this great calamity," she said. "Dearest Walter, let us deprecate the stroke, by submission, not despair. Here, in this wilderness, away from men, shut out from human haunts, let us erect in our own hearts the fane of worship, and bow at the footstool of the Eternal, with contrition and praise. We have erred—we——"

"I—I, alone," interrupted the shuddering Walter—" 'tis I who have called down the judgment. Thou, all angel as thou art! thou art blasted in my fall. Would to God these sinews had dried up!—would to God, this hand had withered, ere it had dealt so many deaths!" And as he thought of the scene of slaughter—upon the destruction which had fallen upon his friends and dependants—upon the scathing ruin which had involved his whole race—hate and impatience

tience of the summary vengeance of king John, arose, and all his better feelings turned to rancour.

“Anon, all may be well,” sighed the countess, clinging to that outstretched arm, and struggling down the shudder at her heart. “Sure, in mutual affray, death cannot be classed murder; sure —”

De Lacey interrupted her by a palsied start.—“He who sheddeth man’s blood,” he pronounced, “by man shall his blood be shed.” It is a law, old as the iron base of this earth;—a law, framed and issued by God himself;—a law, not to be repealed for a crawling worm like me!”

“Yet is it a law admitting wide and opposite construction,” urged the countess. “You think too deeply. As well may John’s avenging fire be just, as manslaughter be murder.” She paused—she turned her mild eyes upon the bleached and quivering features of her lord,

lord, but De Lacey's only answer was a sigh.

In the self-reproach and utter despondency of the earl, the countess felt to gather resolution and fortitude. Without a murmur she endured the alternations of heat and cold, of wet and dry; she cowered amid rocks and forests; she braved all the privations and vicissitudes of adventure and peril: and not once, until the pitying Hugh, reading the gangrene at her heart, offered himself to journey to Killin Castle, and glean tidings of the absent Margaret, did her feelings relax to womanish softness; then, she pressed his hand in mute token of acknowledgment, and she turned aside her face to hide her blinding tears. Perhaps there can scarcely be found a parallel of heavier woe than capricious fortune heaped upon the house of De Lacey—humbling their boast and their power, and exchanging the mightiness of rule for adversity the most abject!

Long

Long and painful was the struggle betwixt the noble brothers, which, on this errand of adventure, should dare the possibility of recognition. Walter's brave spirit rallied to the enterprise; but the impulsive call of nature held him back: it spoke in a thousand nameless urgencies, in the pleading look of the countess, in the helplessness of the unconscious Matilda—and the reasonings and the perseverance of Hugh prevailed. He left, when light scarcely gleamed in the heavens—left to suspense and wakeful woe—for they parted, as though to meet no more on earth. Ah! little did they dream, through those long—long hours of anxious watching, the tragic stride of persecution! little did they guess, the fell storm, stretching, and bursting, o'er every hope, and every hold! The earl of Ulster returned, but despair lived in his eye: he had escaped recognition, but he bore back ruin and death. Killin Castle, and Tahmelio, and Obowy, and
Norrach,

Norrach, and Donemaws, and every other rich possession, in the king's name, and by the king's arms, had been seized and despoiled.

"And my Margaret," cried out the half-frantic mother.

Hugh pointed upwards—"An angel in yon heaven," he pronounced, "praying mercy on us all!"

Weak and inefficient is the force of language to portray the pang of such bereavement; yet beneath the stroke, the bleeding heart rallies; for God "tempereth the storm to the shorn lamb."

Again the lord Hugh departed, not to seek out fresh disaster, but to plan, to reconnoitre, to effect some mode for escape. Ireland held forth no single spot of security: the merciless vengeance of king John, burning fiercer than even his desolating fire, was unsated; and the foster-brother, and the kindred of the lord of Kilbarrock, thirsted for the life-blood of all and every De Lacey.

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To minute the scapes, and difficulties, and hazards, tending to the water's edge, would be to incur the charge of prolixity, without advancing interest. Disguised in the tattered garb of beggary—moving in the gloom of twilight, or wooing the hazy verge of night and morning—craving the chance largess of charity, or sustaining life with the culled berry and the mountain brook—they passed through those provinces 'o'er which their power late held sway, and they gained the neighbourhood of Waterford, anxious to take shipping, and to pass forthwith to France. But fortune had yet in store one poisoned arrow: the earl of Ulster, sanguine and eager, dared the ken of men; and in the harbour of Waterford, parleying for swift conveyance to the opposite coast, he was known—he was seized—and the lord of Meath, together with his countess and helpless child, were cast on the lagging powers of their own exertions.

Then

Then was it that heroism rose in the breast of this adventurous lady; that marvelling at the prolengthened stay of Hugh, and scarce daring to embody the wild fears floating in her brain, at night-fall, in despite of the doubts and opposition of De Lacey, she stole away from her hiding-place, and in the peopled streets of Waterford, heard the appalling tale of his detention. She shrieked not, neither did she lose her self-possession: life, and liberty, and all that was dear and near on earth, felt to hang upon the instant: she fled back—and when she breathed the sad disclosure, she became, in one, the mild reprover and the steady comforter. The feelings and the passions of De Lacey were as wax in the mould of her influence: she wept with him—she lamented with him—she joined in his railings—she harkened to his despair; yet maintaining all her ascendance, she led him in the spider-line of tenderness. Dropping many a tear, and

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giving many a heart-pang, to the luckless fate of their captured brother—tracing death in the arrest, and lacking all power to rescue, they passed swift away from Waterford—and at Cork, embarking in a light skiff, they bid adieu to their native Ireland:—and whilst exchanging a turbulent land for a less turbulent ocean—whilst battling the strife of waves and wind—be it for us to take a bird's-eye scan around, and to cast light on the movements of other of our characters.

The fall of the lord of Kilbarrock stirred all that was rancorous in the heart of O'Chahargy: on the blood-stained clay he vowed hate and vengeance—and wofully did he fulfil his vow: for it was he, who bore the garbled tale of treason and disaffection, seasoned with seeming plausibility, and garnished with subtle lies, straight to the ear of the jealous John; who playing on the dark vindictive humours of the monarch, and teaching

ing him to feel danger and distrust in the greatness and power of the noble brothers, crushed that greatness, and that power, with the mildew of his hate. Already steeped in the blood of the father, relentless as death, he thirsted to quaff his rage in the blood of the son: but Heaven averted the annihilating stroke; and though, with hell in his heart, he vainly sought the proclaimed murderer of Kilbarrock, he left emptiness and waste throughout all the rich inheritance of De Lacey. But wherefore should the scenes of that disastrous persecution be enlarged upon?—wherefore should the blood be measured, and the groans be numbered? Many a life was wantonly squandered, and many a heart was woefully rent: horror marked the flight of the pursued, and guilt gathered in the scathing fire of the pursuers. Proceed we then to the sacking of the castle of Killin, where the blast in fits howled from the hills, and the over-

cast sky, drifting in many a shower, wept, as it were, the turpitude of man : for it was there, that the first-born of De Lacey, sojourned, unconscious of the death-storm, lowering so fitfully o'er the fortunes of her house. Darkness, suited to violence and rapine, covered the advance of the assailants : the first parley closed in blows ; the first blow forced the outworks : desolation and ruin spoke in the simultaneous rush ; resistance died in the birth, and all the horrors of fire and storm broke on the instant. Wild and wide was the carnage : night closed in blood ; and ere morning spoke in the gloaming of a dun and gloomy sky, of all who abided in Killin Castle, not one soul breathed, save the infant Margaret. Like unto Macbeth, the infant Margaret's seemed as a charmed life ; for O'Chahargy knew her a De Lacey, yet could he not slay !—or was it the arm of Heaven which arrested the stroke ?—or was it the grace of Heaven, which

which turned and softened the murderer's heart, even in the moment of raging desolation? Already did the clenched dagger glare in the uncertain blaze of torchlight; already did the sharpened point graze the little throat of the intended victim: the child looked up, and her look, and her cry, was so piteous, that tears started to his eyes; and as though to substantiate human inconsistency, they fell, and they mingled with the sanguine spots, spattering and begrimming his stern features.

Quick from a persecutor do we behold O'Chahargy a protector; yet carefully did he hide the tale of deliverance, lest reaching the ear of the fugitive lord of Meath, it should solace one heart-pang: and when, for a brief season, he placed his new charge in the hamlet of Ardraccan, with the mother of O'Carroll, it was by the one solitary name of Margaret; and when, from Ardraccan, he removed her into Normandy, and

consigned her to the Ursuline nuns at Carentan, it was with none other than an orphan's prospect. Years came, and thought came with years; and often did O'Chahargy muse on the sad tragedy, and marvel at the rancour which had steeped him so deep in blood—forgetful, that one evil propensity, uncurbed, leadeth to the annihilation of every virtue.

Fickle and changeable, as the winds veering from the four quarters of the heavens, was the rule and the state policy which, in those years of darkness, alternately elevated and depressed—lavishing prodigal favours, or dealing forth ruin and woe. In his turn, Symmachus O'Chahargy fell under the powerful lash of an emissary of king John; and whilst writhing in the misery of attainder—whilst flying from human haunts, he sought safety in woods, and wilds, and forests—whilst shrinking from the storm and the peril, he knew no bed save the green moss, no shelter

save the mountain cavern—all the deeds of the past crowded in review:—the headless trunk of the father, floated on a sea of blood; the wrongs and persecutions of the sons, gaped, as a hell, to catch, and hold, his scared and trembling spirit. It was then, that first stricken with fast growing contrition, all the sternness of his nature, relaxing and changing to remorse, the dream of reparation arose; but the tangled yarn of De Lacey's knotted and complicated destiny, baffled the rising and strengthening impulse. If on earth, whither could he seek him? He had driven him from Ireland—he had barred the chance of his return: and now, sick, and labouring with many ills, when he would have claimed that pity he had never shewn, all possibility of trace was lost. In this heavy stress, conscience pricking and goading in the foul taint of past actions, and enervating fear, the twin partner of guilt, steeping the future

in sable die, fanaticism, instilled with mother's milk, turned to the absolving powers of the church; and disguised, and drooping with disease and misery, though under sentence of forfeiture, a proclaimed traitor, and a fugitive, he sought the confession-chair in the church of Mellifont Abbey. The monk, Dennis Fitzgerald, a pious brother of the order, and self-bound, by voluntary vow, to the distant sepulchre of our crucified Lord, shrived the death-sick spirit; and from the confession-chair in the church of Mellifont Abbey, Symmachus O'Chahargy returned, a conscience-stricken and bleeding penitent.

Passing over the faithful and tried services of the honest O'Carroll, who having shared the sunshine of his fortune, scorned to scud and shrink away in the shower—escaping into Normandy, at Carentan, as we have already related, he claimed, at the hands of the mother superior, the immediate guardianship of
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the supposed orphan Margaret: and locking the tale of her birth and her wrongs deep within his own breast, from Carentan he speeded to Angers, to crave of a friend and tried colleague, succour and counsel. But the iron hand of adversity, in every form, pressed hard upon him: on the journey, he fell into the toil of a fierce brigand; and when despoiled, and borne down, in spirit and in means, he reached Angers, it was to find the friend he sought beneath the turf. The man he had most injured, upon whom he had poured out the full vial of rage and hate, through the all-mysterious and all-merciful interposition of Providence, was the man, that in the hour of heaviest emergency, stretched forth the arm to succour. De Lacey, as we have already shewn, sustained him in the death-pang; forgiving and forgetting, saw him laid in hallowed earth; and ignorant of the fond tie, so hidden, and so roughly severed, received into

his own peculiar guardianship, the child, whose tragic destiny, he had often mourned with tears of blood! And now, tarrying but a brief moment within the dungeon, which, at Waterford, closed upon the earl of Ulster, and narrating, in few words, his escape from the trammel of his foes—his immediate flight from Ireland into France—his long and vain search for his proscribed and unhappy brother—his bosomed rancour against king John—his zealous espousal of the disputes and wars of Philip Augustus—his arrival in England—his leaguings with the hostile barons—and his starting up, in conscious but despoiled greatness, amid the council assembled in the church of the monastery at St. Edmund's-bury—we will hasten to rejoin, and further to shed light, on the exiled lord of Meath and his heroic Margaret.

The necessity for exertion passed, and that heroism faded; or rather, not the heroism

heroism of the spirit, but the body's strength. The countess had borne up against sorrow, against persecution, against adversity in its darkest hue; she had been the active and adventurous help-mate of her afflicted lord;—she had smothered the anguish of the mother in the duties of the wife;—she had tried, in the crying calls upon her exertion and her fortitude, to expunge the carnage at Killin Castle: but when beyond the reach of king John's desolating power—when in the security of her own humble home—when in the cottage on the banks of the Gartambe, she existed on the daily toil of the disguised Walter—when left alone to reflection and to care, all the appalling terrors of the past revived, all the conjured horrors of despoliation and murder; and often, steeping the little Matilda in her tears, would she start away in wild frenzy, as fancy pointed the reeking steel at the innocent throat of her slaughtered Margaret.

The bow, too tightly stretched, will snap; the heart, too heavily taxed, will break! The countess faded almost imperceptibly away, until little, save a light and beautiful shadow, remained, bending, tottering, and smiling, on the confines of the grave. Alas! that grave was opening fast—that inevitable destiny of man was hastening to fulfilment! The countess felt the gangrene at her heart, felt the deep sure intimation; yet the bright glow upon her cheek, and the brighter fire in her eye, deceived the anxious watchfulness of De Lacey. He pictured not the storm until it broke; he anticipated not the bereavement, until the life-despoiled clay, lay unconscious of his lamentations and his agony.

It was then, that the white monks of Cisteaux saved his brain from maddening; that descanting on our perishable hold on all of happiness below, they gradually taught him to look to a firmer union beyond the sky. That all of
earth

earth was imperfect and prone to change, his own chequered fortune could bear him woful witness;—that from the fall, our sins and our backslidings wage direful war against our peace, he had learned in many festering recollections;—and that life was a tangled brake, thick set with thorns, and duly and faithfully trodden, would lead to a brighter future, all of religion loudly taught! That future then became the goal and the resting-place of his hopes;—the desire of that future, stilled the tide of angry passions, and found him, if not patient, at least, uncomplaining at his lot. In the gradual growth of his young and lovely Matilda, a new, an irresistible candidate, assailed at once the laboured-for blank of stoicism: all of coldness, all of indifference, yielded to nature's sway:—and when returning from his daily toil in the convent gardens, she ever hailed and ever cheered him with sweetest smiles of gratitude and thankfulness, he felt, that
though

though poor to what he had been, still was he rich in the treasures of the heart; he felt, that however debased in fortune, however depressed by man, the daughter of his enskied Margaret, would tend him to the end—would solace him in the heavy season of sickness, sooth the struggles of his parting spirit, and close his eyes, ere he descended to the tomb!

CHAPTER X.



“Time bringeth all things to fruition;
Time perfects and destroys:
Time rings the marriage-peal, then knolls the death-
knell:
Time parcels out the bridal vesture—
And Time weaves the shroud!”

To advance one step beyond **RUNNEMEDE**, beyond the signature of the great charter, ensuring to all classes of society the important grant of their liberties,
would

would be to plunge into all the subtilty, and deceit, and narrow-minded chicanery, marking the actions and character of king John—would be to entangle ourselves in the state policy and dark intrigues of that fitful and complicated period; for truly was it a period, when the wild and turbulent passions of men submitted not to the curb-rein of order; when civil discord arose out of party-hate and nonconformity, and blind and stubborn self-will, swept from the king even to the peasant. Diverge we then from the iron line of history, to visit and to dispose of the lighter characters in our drama, that in grafting fiction on the firmer basis of truth, we may—in humble conformity to the bounden rule of romance—expound every subtle ramification, and dismiss our readers quietly to bed, without leaving on their minds, the haze of wild conjecture, or incurring to ourselves the time-consuming tax of prolixity. Joy, as we have already written,

ten,

ten, lacketh few words in its exposition ; —and such joy, as gladdened the long-tried hearts of De Lacey, and De Lacey's daughters, needeth words, more nervous, than can be found in aught of language. It was a joy, to expunge all the tears of the past !—a joy, like that sunbeam in nature, which darts, so fresh, and so bright, when the tempest has rolled away, and from ink the pure sky assumes anew all its azure !—a joy, which none can appreciate, save those, who have sustained the mighty transition from misery to rapture—from utter despondence into all the bewilderment of hope ; whose lives, from blank and morbid dejection, have brightened into those rainbow-tints known in anticipation !

Wild and complicated were the feelings of the earl of Meath, as he perused the candid and self-debasing confession of Symmachus O'Chahargy ; as alternately, he marvelled at the subtilty of his revenge, and blessed the gracious *amende*,
existing,

existing, in the preservation of his first born Margaret. Again and again did he read the clear and concise narrative, beginning in the murder of his father, and ending in the secretion of his child: and often did he pause, and raise his tearful eyes in pious gratitude to Heaven; and often did he ask if it were indeed true?—if he were still a sojourner in that same world, which had awarded to him, and to his, so many heart-pangs—which had wrecked the fond hopes of his early life, and for so many, many long years, had presented nought, save a rough and sterile desert?

• From *Runnemedede*, accompanied by the earl de la Marche, and the lord Theobald de Verdon—and leaving the abstruse and complicated woof of state policy in the hands of the appointed nobles—De Lacey proceeded forthwith to Holmes Castle, anxious to entwine in a closer link, the already knit hearts of Margaret and Matilda: and when at
Holmes

Holmes Castle—when clasping to his paternal breast, his first born—last found Margaret; when yielding her, but to return the fond caresses of his scarce more dear Matilda, rich, almost to overflowing, was his cup of blessings:—it seemed, as though relenting and all-capricious Fortune, strove at reparation for the past!

“Never—never more,” he exclaimed, gazing alternately upon each, “will I murmur at my lot. Heaven, in this gracious behest, deals forth mercy, not justice!”

From Holmes Castle, friendship and gratitude led to Heringworth; for Matilda pined to pour into the bosom of the lady Millicent, the rich acknowledgment of her felicity; and De Lacey, and Le Brun, to offer the heartfelt tribute of thanks, for the hospitality, and almost paternal kindness, of the baron de Cantilupe. At Heringworth, did the first cast of care, pass, like a scudding cloud,
o'er

o'er the lovely features of Matilda; for there did she hear, that the blight of ill requited love, still pressed upon the mind and spirits of the lord George; that away from home and from country, self-banished from the haunts of his happier youth, in the court of the king of France, he was toiling for that quietude he had so lucklessly forfeited. Ay, and through life, may we venture to aver, that same blight, shedding ice upon his prospects, led to joyless celibacy: for we trace in the genealogy of the house of Cantilupe, that the lord George de Cantilupe died, and "left no copy;" and that the possessions of William, baron de Cantilupe, by marriage, passed with the lady Millicent, into the hands of the lord Eudo de la Zouch.

"Grant, Heaven, he meet with a kinder, gentler heart!" sighed Matilda; "a heart, free to feel, and to sympathize in all his hopes!" and she yielded pity,
and

and she shed a tear, at the recital of his disappointment.

“ Alack !” said Millicent, “ it was a mischievous chance, to smile in seeming freedom, when the tie of holy church fettered all power to change. God forefend us ! so little did I guess you bride, that oft have I shed the subtle oil of prophesied encouragement upon his ill-starred flame. Marry ! had I known the adamantine bar, I had crushed the embryo passion.”

“ A wife, without a name,” observed Matilda, eager to refute the charge of cold reserve ; “ a captive in a land of strangers ; living within the rule of king John, and knowing king John the inveterate foe of husband and of father—how could I frame a tale, so wild and complicated ? Beside, how guess the dire necessity, till the theme of generous friendship changed to fearful love ? Then, Heaven can bear me witness, with many a heart-pang, I disclosed all
to

to my uncle Hugh. I told of the past, even from the farthest stretch of memory—I——”

“We will sift none further,” interrupted Millicent. “I know it all, dearest Matilda. I heard it from the lips of my poor George. He deplored, but he impeached not a single action. Would it had been counter!” She pressed the hand of Matilda as she spoke, and tenderly she kissed her cheek, as she playfully concluded—“We had been such affectionate sisters!”


The marriage of the lady Millicent with the lord Eudo de la Zouch spoke in more than silver favours: it brought to the halls of Heringworth, an influx of gay company; and for many days, did the buttery teem with smoking cheer, and the wassail-cup smile welcome to the peasantry. In the lower hall 'twas Adam Morley led the revel: he forgot the infirmitics of age; he set at nought the rust of time: together with
his

his happy Mabel, did he join in the sportive merriment; did he pile huge branches on the flaming bonfire, and baptize in flagons of sparkling ale, the all-auspicious festival. From Heringworth, the blessed and blessing pair, journeyed into Derbyshire: and from Heringworth, the earl of Meath, and his happy family, repaired to Ireland. The heavens, bright and gilded, smiled on the voyage; for the sun shed millions of gems on the dancing wave, and the sky reflected nought save azure. Brisk and favouring was the breeze which filled the sails; and when the vessel anchored in the bay of Dublin, varied and wild was the rush of individual feeling. Matilda clung to the arm of her lord, her heart swelling, her eyes blinding with tears of gratitude and transport; now striving to speak; and now, smothering down the sob, rising well-nigh to suffocation. And Margaret too boomed all the struggling conflicts of
such

such a season : her hands were clasped, and her cheeks and her lips were so colourless, that she looked, as her dark hair floated on the wind, like some chiselled statue. But De Lacey—who can paint the feelings of De Lacey—the wild, the almost maddening contrarieties of his grief and his joy ! For a brief moment the grave yielded up its buried treasure : heritage, friends, country, crowded in rapid succession : his home, his Margaret, glowed in the day-dream of his fancy, and all the trials of the past were lost. Alas ! it was a brief moment : with the next, his Margaret, wrapt in the mort-cloth, mocked all the cheating promises of terrestrial felicity. “ In the grave—in the grave alone,” he articulated ; then glancing on his sympathizing daughters, he burst into a flood of tears.

The boats were lowered, and the busy action of the crew, the buzz of voices, and the hasty tread of preparation, rallied

lied to exertion. De Lacy raised his hand to dash away the tears : he looked up ;—he ventured a glance towards the shore ;—he saw the hills, the green plains, and the waving trees of his native isle, burnished in setting sunshine ;—he saw a thousand varying hues, dappling in richness the distant city : again a dizziness stole over him, yet he turned to look at the being who stood sobbing at his side. It was O'Carroll, gazing with outstretched arms towards Dublin, and greeting it, as fond mother would greet a returning child.

“ I have travelled far,” he sobbed out ;
“ but, by the powers, never have I light-
ed among fields so green, or woods so
blithe ! arry, but the glance gives
me new life ! If ever I turn tail upon
thee, oh blessed Ireland ! may I be
burned for a heretic, and may my bones
lack Christian burial !”

The lauding, and the retracing scenes
and haunts endeared to recollection, fol-
lowed

lowed so quick upon each other, that De Lacey gathered strength in the frequency. But though his tears flowed less freely—though he stifled down the sighs of his care-fraught bosom—though he smiled upon the endearments of his family—often would the past revive, and rob him of his quietude. Yes, it was the contrast 'twixt past and present; it was that bereavement of the heart, known in the death of his idolized Margaret, that fashioned the tedious and fearful void. Often would he steal away from the happier presence of his children, and linked in the arm of his brother Hugh, shrink into shades obscure, where

“Rocks, and streams, and sweeping woods,
Were lost in a wild horizon,”

misering his own griefs; yet unwilling to graft his griefs, on their lighter years, and brighter prospects. But though himself bigoted to moody thought; though

lacking but the shorn crown and scapular to shape him to the priesthood, he joyed in the happiness of those around him : and quick on his resumption of authority, and investiture in the rights of his seigniory, did he speed O'Carroll to the home, he had so often and so ardently pined for. But at Ardbraccan, O'Carroll met with blight on his warm hopes ; for he saw but the cold and narrow bed of his mother's rest : the cottage had passed into other hands, and strange faces shed ice upon his greetings. Yet was there one in the hamlet who felt love-begetting pity ; who mingled tears with his tears, and wooed back the sunshine of smiles. It was the little Norah, as pretty, as gentle, and as kind, as when, faithful to the interests of his master, he had fled away to France : and soon did the lady Margaret de Verdon yield the marriage portion ; and soon, wellnigh within the shadow of the castle walls, did a new cottage smile, and offer a
blithe

blithe shelter to the summer and the winter of his life :—for time speedeth on in joy or in grief, in peril or in safety ; and spring, and summer, and autumn, and winter, marketh but the stages of man !

Perhaps it were unwitting—knowing the chances and vicissitudes of the world—to linger longer with beings so comparatively blessed, lest we be compelled to note, the gathering of tempest, and of change : yet would we say, that gratitude for past and signal mercies, lived in the hearts of the lords of Meath and Ulster ; for we find in the annals of olden time, that monasteries, and preceptories, and hospitals, were erected, and dedicated by them, to worship and to holiness.—That the lord of Meath, gave the seigniory of Dengle, to John Fitz-Acory, nephew to the abbot of the white monks of Cisteaux : and that he invited into Ireland, many brothers of the aforesaid monastery, and bestowed upon them, lands and riches, together

N 2

with

with the cell called Fonry, as a lasting acknowledgment of their charity and good counsel. In the county of Louth, the priory of St. John Baptist, of the order of cross-bearers, owns the lord of Meath as their first benefactor. The friary of Beaubec, in the county of Meath, was the donation of Walter de Lacey : and at Kilmainam, a preceptory of the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, was founded by Walter de Lacey ! The Benedictine priory of St. Andrew, in the territory of Ardes, was founded by Hugh lord of Ulster : and in the same territory, a preceptory for knights of the Hospital ! And close knit in fellowship with Christ and with men, hand in hand, at Clonard, the noble brothers founded a monastery of Augustin canons, and dedicated it to the memory of St. Peter ! And St. Mary's Abbey of Plary, where in the monks and the nuns lived in separate houses, the one of the order of Premonstratenses, the other of Cistercians,

cians, bear incontestible record of their devout and holy practices!—And in 1240, we find the fate of Walter de Lacy, earl of Meath, finally accomplished; his toil of earth over; his hopes of recompence began:—and two years after, Hugh de Lacey, earl of Ulster, paying the like debt of flesh, was buried in the church of his own founding, belonging to the convent of Friars Minors at Carrickfurgus! And the ladies Margaret and Matilda, and their lords, and their children, and their children's children, have passed away! Yes, they have sunk to sleep, them and their race; they have fallen, “like the thistle's head, beneath autumnal winds.” What though “they were clouds of hail, with squally winds in their skirts! shadowy death flees over whole hosts! *Over* them, swells dark-rolling Time!”

NOTE.

To suit more immediately my own peculiar purpose, and availing myself of the laws and liberties of romance—from the flight of the earls of Meath and Ulster, after the fall of John de Courson lord of Rathenny and Kilbarrock, and when the prosperous arms of king John drove them from Ireland—I have divorced the fate of the brothers, and I have borne the lord Walter de Lacey, forthwith into the province of Marche, and in a lone cottage on the picturesque banks of the Gartampe, in disguise, and in servitude, I have fixed him in the sole occupation of gardener to an abbey of Cisterciaux monks. Whereas it was in the monastery of St. Taurin, at Evreux in Normandy, that labouring from sunrise to sunset, employed in clay, and brick work, and sometimes in gardening, the two noble brothers, concealing their wrongs and their rank, shared the hard crust of penury, until discovered by the abbot, they were, at his earnest and humble intercession, restored to their former degree and lordships, upon paying, each, to king John, the sum of two thousand five hundred marks.

And

And I would further note, that in the joust in Smithfield, I have, to accommodate my own story, substituted the said Walter de Lacey earl of Meath, in the place of John de Courcy, first lord of Conaught ; who having been deposed and cast into prison, tradition tells us, was, by king John—well knowing his might and courage—summoned, to fight as champion of England, for the decision of a seigniory and certain castles, long in controversy between the two courts of England and France. That the said John de Courcy, boldly told king John, he would not fight for him, but that he would fight to the death for the right of England ; and forthwith a day was appointed for the engagement : but when the champion of France—whom I have ventured to personify in Hugh le Brun, earl de la Marche—heard of his glant strength, and more than mortal prowess, he declined the combat, and the seigniory was yielded to king John.

In the life of the earl de la Marche, too, I have ventured wild and wide deviation :—for after whole years of contention and strife, gendering in the violence and injustice of king John, for having filched from him his betrothed bride, the young and beautiful Isabel, daughter of Aymer count of Angoulesme :—after the death of king John, we find that nobleman wedded to the royal widow,
and

and urging and instigating her son, king Henry the Third, to levy war with France, for the recovery of those provinces, once annexed to the crown of England.—And the lady Maud or Matilda de Lacey, was in reality married to the lord Geoffry de Geneville, who in 1273 was made justiciary of Ireland. It remains alone now to speak of the lord Savary de Mauleon : and I find the name of the lord Savary de Mauleon, a troubadour, and a rich baron of Poitou, in the successive reigns of king Richard the First, John, and Henry the Third. Some of his poetry is still extant ; and as in the vicissitudes of his long and turbulent life, I find him bearing arms, first in the service of France, and then of England, I have selected him as a fit abettor in the *dénouement* of my pages. That he was capable of all the romance of love common to the chivalrous age in which he lived, an extant fragment, addressed to the lady of his heart, will bear ample testimony. “ Lady, you have conquered all the world. It is the height of my ambition to conquer you. I have collected Basques, and Brabançons (auxiliary troops) ; and thanks to my care, we are five hundred of us, who will punctually execute your orders. Explain your wishes ; give us your commands. Our coursers are ready bridled. We will mount them instantly in your cause.”

High

High in the confidence of king John, Savary de Mauleon was made commander of all the places that prince retained in Gascony ; and he served him faithfully, through the whole of his turbulent reign ; and during the civil war, raging so fiercely, one year after the signing of the great charter at Runnemede, falling into an ambuscade of the Londoners, he lost most of his men, and being himself grievously wounded, he narrowly escaped with life. In the reign of king Henry the Third, Savary de Mauleon was governor of the town and castle of Rochelle, and long and gallantly did he defend them, against the close siege of Louis the Eighth, son of Philip Augustus : but being, as tradition hands down, basely deceived in expected succours from England—he having received chests, laden with iron, instead of silver, wherewith to pay the garrison—he surrendered the town and fortress, and during the remainder of his days, attached himself to the service of France.

FINIS.

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